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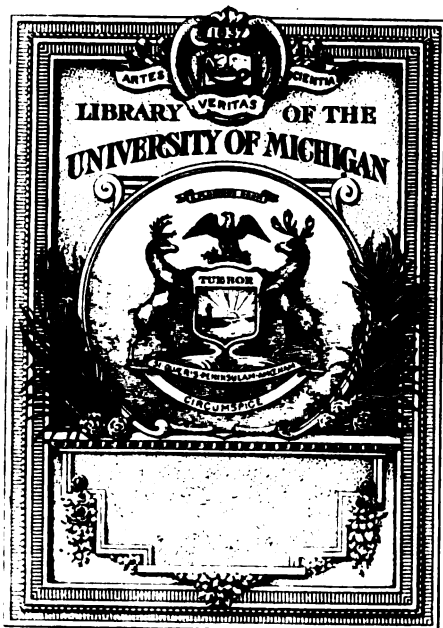
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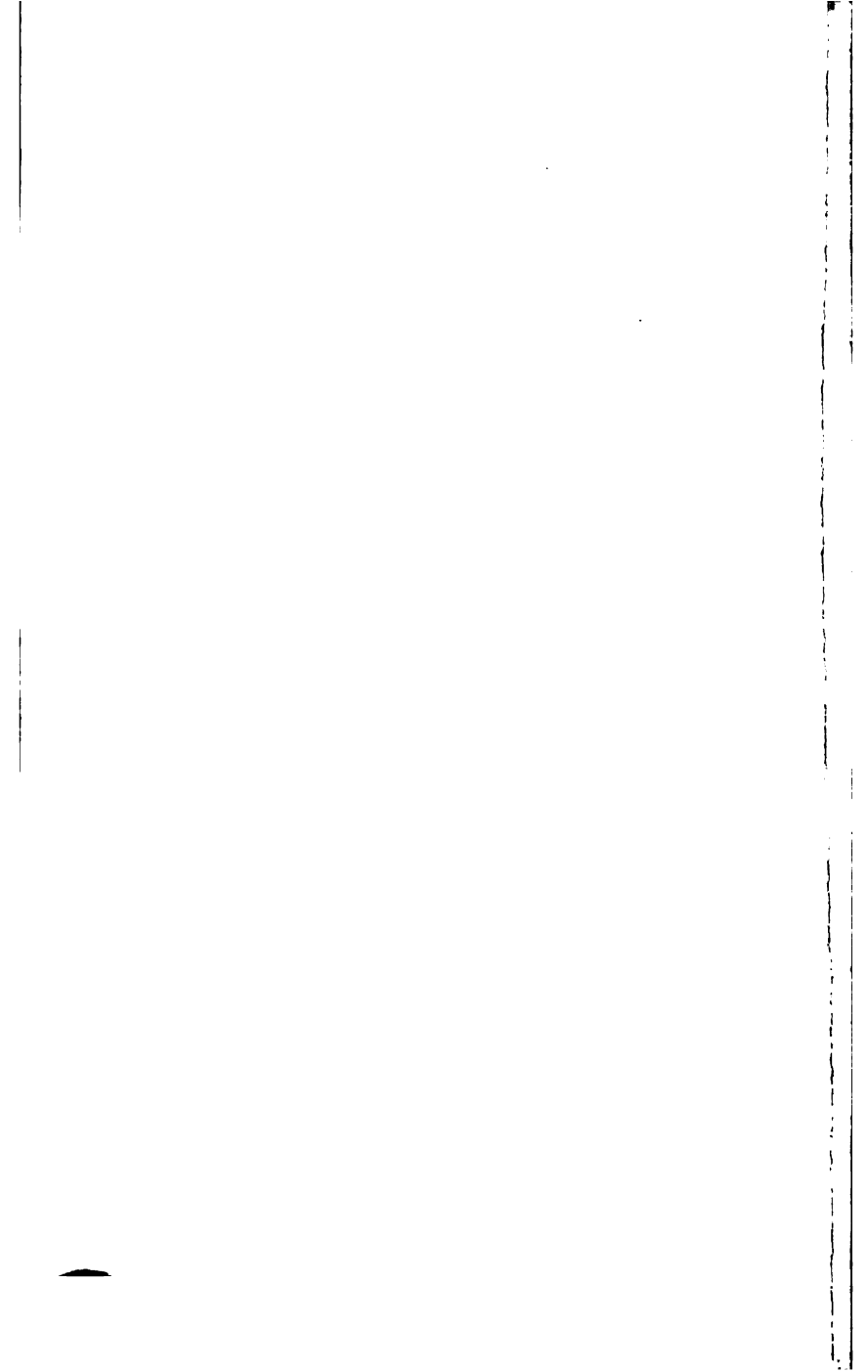
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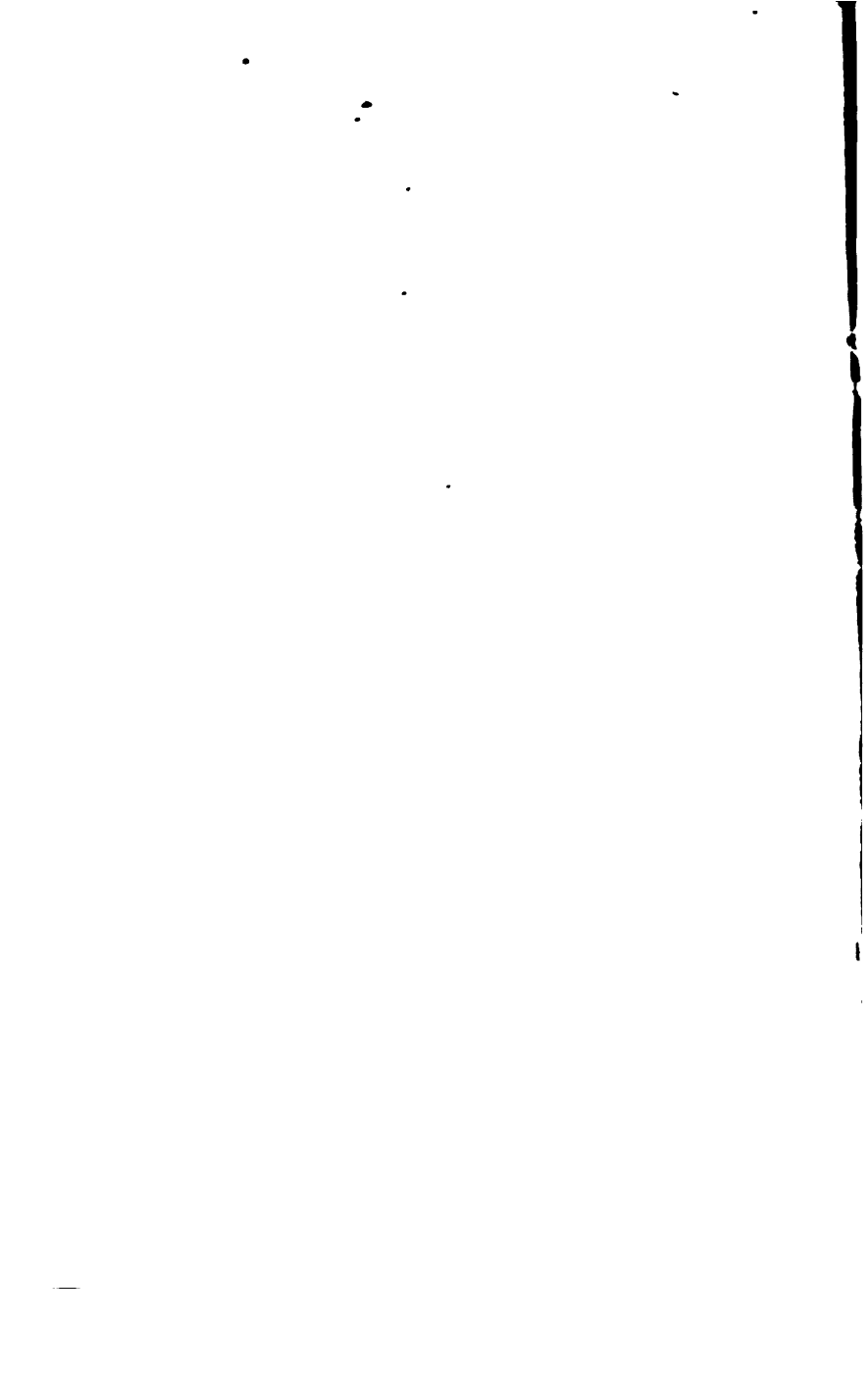
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A PEASANT

247

HOME LIFE IN ITALY

LETTERS FROM THE APENNINES

BY

Waterfield,
z

LINA (DUFF GORDON)

A 25

(MRS AUBREY WATERFIELD)

WITH THIRTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS BY

AUBREY WATERFIELD

AND FIFTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS



NEW YORK
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1908



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TO
LORD STANMORE
WHO FIRST LED US TO OUR
ARCADIAN PARADISE

200000



PREFACE

I FEEL that I owe the reader some explanation for having presented my subject in so incomplete and unsystematic a way. Now that its pages are in the inexorable hands of the printer, many other aspects of "home life" than those I have chosen confront me, and seem to resent my neglect. But this book did not originally spring from any desire to offer information. In the first joy of finding myself in an out-of-the-way corner of Italy, where the social conditions of the place enabled me to make real friends among the people, I put on paper my impressions of the little world around me, describing what appealed personally to me, what seemed interesting or amusing and likely to convey to my English friends the sense I felt of remoteness from our trafficking century. This method obliged me to leave out many things, and content myself with the mere suggestion of others.

Those who have travelled the length and breadth of Italy, and know how far asunder, in thought and aspiration, the South is from the North, will realise the impossibility of giving an account of Italian social life that shall either be complete or true of all parts of the country equally. Habits and customs vary

between one province and another, and facts which hold good of one place would not hold good of another fifty miles away. Besides, the reader will remember what Stevenson says about "facts":

"The word 'facts' is, in many ways, crucial. I have spoken with Jesuits and Plymouth Brethren, mathematicians and poets, dogmatic republicans and dear old gentlemen in bird's-eye neckcloths, and each understood the word 'facts' in an occult sense of his own."

Will the reader, therefore, forgive me if I have not brought him to that particular hill-top which he had expected to climb? And will he also forgive me the company of peasants and artisans among whom I ask him to pic-nic? Once he has shaken hands with them perhaps he will pardon my introduction.

During the ten years that I lived in Florence I saw old ideals shattered, old customs change and crumble, among a people for whom modernity has far greater and fresher charms than it has for the so-called practical Northerner. In an isolated valley among the Carrara mountains I found the tenacious peasant and artisan living an old-world life, curiously biblical, and retaining in their strong conservatism many characteristics of former times. Doubtless the thought has come to many who have wandered off the beaten track, that, were an Italian of the Renaissance to find himself again in his sleepy provincial town or country villa, he would fall into the life of to-day in Italy, with far less effort than, let

PREFACE

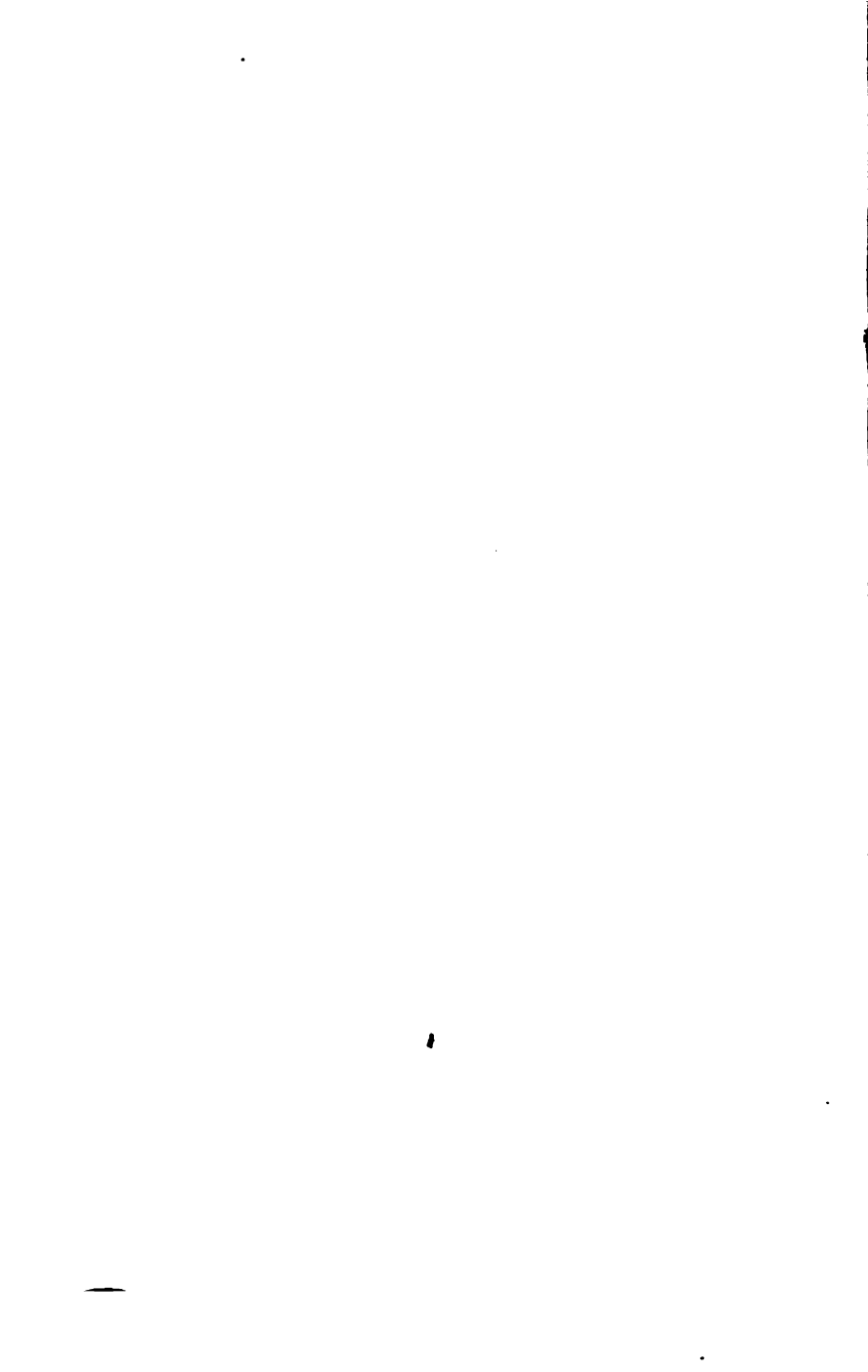
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us say, Falstaff could possibly fall into the life of to-day at Windsor.

A last word. I owe many thanks to my friend Mrs Kerr Lawson for the interest she has shown in this book, and for many suggestions she has given me. Lord Stanmore and Baron de Cosson I have every reason to thank for allowing me to illustrate the book with their beautiful photographs. And to the courtesy of the editor of the *Westminster Gazette* I owe the permission to reprint four articles which appeared in his paper.

L. D. G.

NORTHBOURNE ABBEY,
EASTRY, *July* 1908.



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HOME LIFE IN ITALY

I

ARRIVAL IN ITALY—THE ANTIQUITY DEALER— TRAVELLING THIRD CLASS

La dove è il mio core notte e dia. (King Enzo)

IN the spring of the year 1905, an eventful year to us if to no one else, Italy the Siren called us away from England and all those dear comforts of an English home, to an empty castle among the Carrara mountains. This was by no means our first visit to Italy, but our instincts told us, and they proved to be right, that we should now see her people for the first time.

It was delightful to arrive at an inn like the *Italia* at Bergamo. It called itself "hotel," but it still preserved the atmosphere of the old posting days—days which we praise and our great-aunts and grandmothers roundly abuse. An outside staircase led up to the bedrooms, and, from an open passage, we looked down upon the bustling life of the little courtyard, where the omnibus rumbled in under the arch and the waiters flew about with a well-conceived air of importance. A wood-fire crackled on the low hearth of our bedroom. Italian voices came in at the windows from the street: vendors praising their wares in rapturous tones, and

hawkers of vegetables in all the by-streets of the town: "Oh, look at my greens; how beautiful, how beautiful are my greens! *O Signori, la mia bella verdura*, Oh-h-h!" sang the voices in every variety of mournful ecstasy.

Leaning out of the window I looked upon a swaying multitude of huge umbrellas, their apple-green and crimson colours glistening under the torrential downpour, like the leaves of a big nasturtium. And how it rains in Italy! Heavy drenching rain which seems to hang as something solid from the skies. But I love the southern rain; even in the midst of a town I feel the rejoicing of the vineyards about its walls, and Bergamo, catching the overflow from off the eaves of the Alps, is perhaps the rainiest town in the whole of Italy.

There was just that degree of Italian comfort in the big white-washed dining-room of the inn, which you are likely to enjoy in proportion to the amount of Puritan blood in your veins. The scanty furniture and bare walls, bare except for a large empire mirror, gave the same peaceful sensation that a wide horizon can give in a flat country. The quiet, unadorned little house was as a haven in which to brood over all the loveliness without. But let me hastily confess it, upon this particular day it was not a Lombard peasant with his team of ploughing oxen, or a view of blue mountains, but a plate piled high with steaming *maccheroni* set on a snow-white cloth, a rush-covered flask of red wine, and even a little bunch of tooth-picks bristling between the salt and

pepper, which made my heart beat, conscious that I was once more in Italy—Italy, the land where every moment of the day is lived, where centuries are spanned and you live with the heroes of your childhood and youth ; the land of dreams and disillusion and again of dreams ; the land where your feelings towards its inhabitants change a hundred times a day in the game and battle of Northern wits against Italian *furberia*. How you scold, expostulate and abuse them ; how they cheat and smile with winning grace, then startle you with amazing generosity and kindness ; move you to tears and to laughter ; irritate, interest, delight and distract, until you declare that you love to live among them. And why ? That is the question which I would try and answer in these letters, hiding no fault, colouring no virtue.

The traveller comes to Bergamo to see the exquisite group of Gothic buildings in the Upper Town ; to feast his eyes on Morone portraits, Lotto Madonnas, a jewel-like Pesellino and an early Botticelli, and perhaps to visit the wonderful castle of Colleoni in the plain. But, as I have said, it was a downpour, and what better could we do on a rainy day than visit the Antiquary, gossip and bargain with him ; besides, we had much need of furniture for the gaunt rooms of the Fortezza which loomed ahead of us.

The bric-a-brac shop is the hope of the impoverished Italian with family treasures and the haunt of the knowing traveller in his leisured hours, and his

dealings with the Antiquary have all the excitements of a game : there is just the chance that among the jumble of ugly and beautiful things a real treasure may be found, such as the splendid discovery of " Pan Piping to the Shepherds," by Signorelli, discovered by my uncle and aunt, Mr and Mrs Ross, and which is now one of the chief glories of Berlin. I have heard of one famous picture having been used for years as a protection to a dove-cot, while the Etruscan " Muse of Cortona " had long been used by a peasant as his oven-door. Such finds as these are rare nowadays ; but as one wanders through Italian towns and catches sight of shadowed doorways and Renaissance courtyards beyond, the feeling comes that unknown treasures still hang on the brocaded walls of the big reception rooms. I wonder how many little Italian boys have, like Sir Henry Layard, hit a serene Madonna while aiming a shoe at their nurse ? Years afterwards, he told me, he came across the picture in the National Gallery and recognized the mark of his shoe upon the gown of the Madonna. A vivid impression remained in his mind of the sojourn with his parents in the Palazzo Rucellai in Florence ; but the Italian of to-day seldom shows any influence of his often beautiful surroundings, his mind revolving round tram lines and electricity with the delight of youth feeling its new-born strength. It may be understood why the traveller sometimes seems to take rather an arrogant possession of Italy.

The palaces of northern Italy are especially happy

hunting grounds for the dealer, and it is in these northern towns, a little off the beaten track, that one sees something of the dealer himself. The *Antiquario*, although the very name conjures up a picture of intrigues and weaving of webs for the unwary, is often enough quite a simple sort of man, content with quick sales and small profits. The cleverest of them, who sometimes have begun life as street hawkers, make large fortunes, live in the big towns, and build sham antique castles whereby to dazzle their customers. Many of them are amusing rogues, with a talent for comedy, and can tell capital stories of their adventures and lucky finds, or shed tears over lost opportunities. They are always civil, and, until recently, have never dreamed of assuming the truculent air of the man in the frock coat, who ushers one into a dimly-lighted room padded with brown velvet like a Bond Street shop. The more pretentious of them call themselves "collectors," and refer to their *raccolta* rather in the manner of our own retired wine-merchants and drapers who dabble in art. But the only difference I have ever been able to establish between the two classes is that the dealer buys a thing and sells it, while the "collector" acquires an object of art and then consents to part with it.

In Bergamo we found no enticing window fronts as in the big towns. Like those of Parma and Cremona, the Bergamasque dealers seem to be the middle-men between the indigent Marchese and the Florentine Antiquaries, and live in old palaces

(stowed away in dark by-streets without an attempt to advertise their wares. By some delightful chance we dived into one of these haunts behind Santa Maria Maggiore. In the street the air was moist, warm and delicious ; inside the cavernous retreat, through a dank and dusty atmosphere, we saw a suite of rooms full of fine but worm-eaten furniture. Rococo mirrors, gold frames, monastery tables, Byzantine Madonnas, choir stalls, sacristy chairs, embossed leather, sanctuary lamps and fragments of antique sculpture from abandoned villas, were scattered about ; beautiful embroideries, brocades and laces bulged out of intarsia chests of drawers ; while the owner of this strange medley sat at a Louis Quinze table reading a translation of Fenimore Cooper, a bundle of accounts on one side of him, on the other a Capo di Monte jug and a jewelled reliquary.

Often the *Antiquario* in small towns is a carpenter and keeps a bric-a-brac and furniture warehouse attached to his workshop. At Bergamo the manufacture of antique furniture is carried on in the open, and upon a very elaborate scale, and shows considerable power for imitation. Italians have no partiality for worm-eaten furniture, however beautiful and characteristic it may be.

The price of the modern antiques were quite beyond our purse, but we bought old intarsia chests of drawers, carved chests, and Venetian tables at less than two pounds a-piece. Sometimes a high price on a coveted object made us look sad, and

so forget the lessons, learnt but never mastered, in the difficult art of bargaining. From the Italian purchaser you can learn the right demeanour—a careless debonair spirit, a friendly yet chaffing attitude. The antiquary asks a hundred francs for a piece of china upon which, with the air of unqualified generosity, you offer him the half. He puts on a mournful expression as if he had not tasted food for days and says that he refused double that sum only an hour ago—it is but owing to his esteem for you which makes him lower his price. Whereupon you turn on your heel; and be careful, oh novice! that the craving for the china bowl does not show in the curve of your neck: the Italian dealer, even while most absorbed in the contemplation of his finger-tips or the cobwebs on his rafters, has the eye of a lynx. You return the next day, quite by chance, of course, and you both appear surprised at the meeting. A little fencing ensues, and you prepare to pay, holding out the sum in a fat lump of small notes. Presuming that your price is accepted, you slip some little object into your pocket, saying: “You will give me this bagatelle, *non è vero?*” and the Antiquary retreats gracefully from his ground in the light of your generous patron, and you part excellent friends. But however complacently you may look back upon a stern and successful piece of bargaining, a gleam of pity even shooting into your heart for the dealer, the cruel knowledge is sure to be thrust upon you sooner or later that the man of the rueful countenance trans-

acted an excellent bit of business when he sold the china bowl, "worth four pounds," for fifty shillings.

As I learnt from Signora Ledda, wife of a Bergamasque dealer, the wile of the buyer sometimes outdoes the cunning of the tradesman. No one could resist Ledda, a fat, smiling little woman, who raised her hands in constant protest till they seemed like wings and gave her the air of an animated penguin. We talked so much and grew so friendly, that in a burst of confidence she told me a story against herself with a certain regretful appreciation of its humour.

"*Ah! signora mia,*" said Ledda, heaving a sigh at the recollection, "one day in my husband's absence I ventured to buy what seemed to me a beautiful Greek coin. When I showed it to him he had but two words for it: '*è falso.*' So with grief I put it in the window among the other coins and prayed *S. Antonio e la Beata Madonna* to quickly remedy my blunder. The very next day an ugly German came into my shop, and, after looking at many things, finally picked up the coin with a gruff '*Quanto costa?*'

"Now, said I to myself, not a *centesimo* more than I paid for it, to ease my conscience for selling a thing I knew to be worthless. So ten francs was named. He paid me with a fifty-franc note, for which I gave him change, and he went off with his false coin. But, *cara Signora*, do you imagine that his note was genuine? ! ! !"

And between laughter and crying, in which

Ledda's voice rose and fell in a strain of boo-hoo, boo-hoo, while her shoulders shook and her little hands protested, she volubly described the German as a pig, an assassin, and a thief.

Constant visits to an antiquity dealer sometimes necessitate a journey third class. The first time we viewed these cattle-trucks with alarm, but an air-cushion saved the situation, and the company proved so entertaining that, when time is no object, we now travel third by preference. We travel with peasants and artisans instead of with the affluent and arrogant bourgeois. Of course there are trials: sacks of household goods, or produce from the paternal fields, with a bundle of agricultural implements, are hurled in at the door across your feet; a pedlar's pack finds partial support on your shoulder; and the smoke from a long Tuscan cigar curls up under your nose. Fortunately peasants like fresh air, while the bourgeois, used to his shop or his office, growls about the *aria cattiva*, as he rushes to shut every window. The other day, going to Florence second class, time pressing, I found myself in a compartment where the heating apparatus had gone wrong; it was like a steam-bath. One of my companions, a very smart young man, with the face of an actor, complied with my desire for air by letting down two inches of window; the sun was blazing in a clear December sky. He revenged himself by recounting the trials of travelling with English people. He waved his arms about and puffed out his cheeks in imitation of my heated countrymen as they fling

open every window. Then he hunched himself up in a corner, with newspapers round him and his collar up, looking the picture of resigned misery.

"Poor things," he said, addressing his companions, but glancing compassionately at me; "poor things, indeed we ought to sympathise with them rather than abuse them. They come from a country of ice and perpetual fog, so that when they arrive in the midst of our winter, of course they feel hot. They are always in a state of heat."

At this I raced in with a pæan on the English climate, and threw out a few hints on hygiene, which were received with polite incredulity, and I thought I heard a murmur of "The English are all, 'all mad."

Yes, in our *Seconda* or *Prima* we are very hot, very respectable, and only sometimes amused. Going third the scene seems to change at every station. At one place a crowd of people tumble into the carriage, dividing off into the different sections, and we can watch them from our corner across the low partitions. A violent storm of discussion soon breaks out between the travellers and the newcomers. Only one old woman, who looks like a witch, has remained silent, leaning back as if in a trance. Suddenly the word "Prison" produces a sensation, and she begins to rock herself to and fro, and finally falls on her knees, shrieking: "Holy Madonna, save me! I am innocent!"

"Innocent, indeed," sarcastically remarks a schoolboy sitting opposite. It turns out that she

had incited a maid-servant to steal, receiving the stolen goods, and allowed her daughter to bury alive her unwelcome baby of a day old.

The boy, entranced by the uproar, forgets to alight at his station, and insists upon throwing himself out of the window as the train puffs along, although we do our utmost to hold on to his coat-tails. Having recovered from these incidents, we bring out a tea-basket which produces great interest ; a baby, relinquishing the piece of Bologna sausage, tied round its neck, which it is sucking, wants to play with the matches, and conversation flows. A woman starts up from behind the next division, and, leaning on her folded arms, looks down upon us. She sees an acquaintance, who, until then, had been softly singing love-songs to himself, and a hot political discussion ensues. Her husband is an Anarchist, she proudly declares. She is a dirty type of woman, from the slums of some town : a tawny-coloured kerchief is twisted round her head and tied in a knot at one side. As she waves her claw-like hands, fixes upon us a knowing grin, and harangues us on social equality and the tyranny of princes, our thoughts fly off to the women of the French Revolution.

Music comes to lull our heated senses. An immensely tall and stout young man, with thick moustaches, gets in, and, to the accompaniment of a guitar, bellows forth a passionate love-song. It produces halfpence like hail, even from the cautious peasant. Each in return is handed a fly-leaf, with

the words of the song and a woodcut of the lover, hand on heart, serenading an obdurate lady at a window.

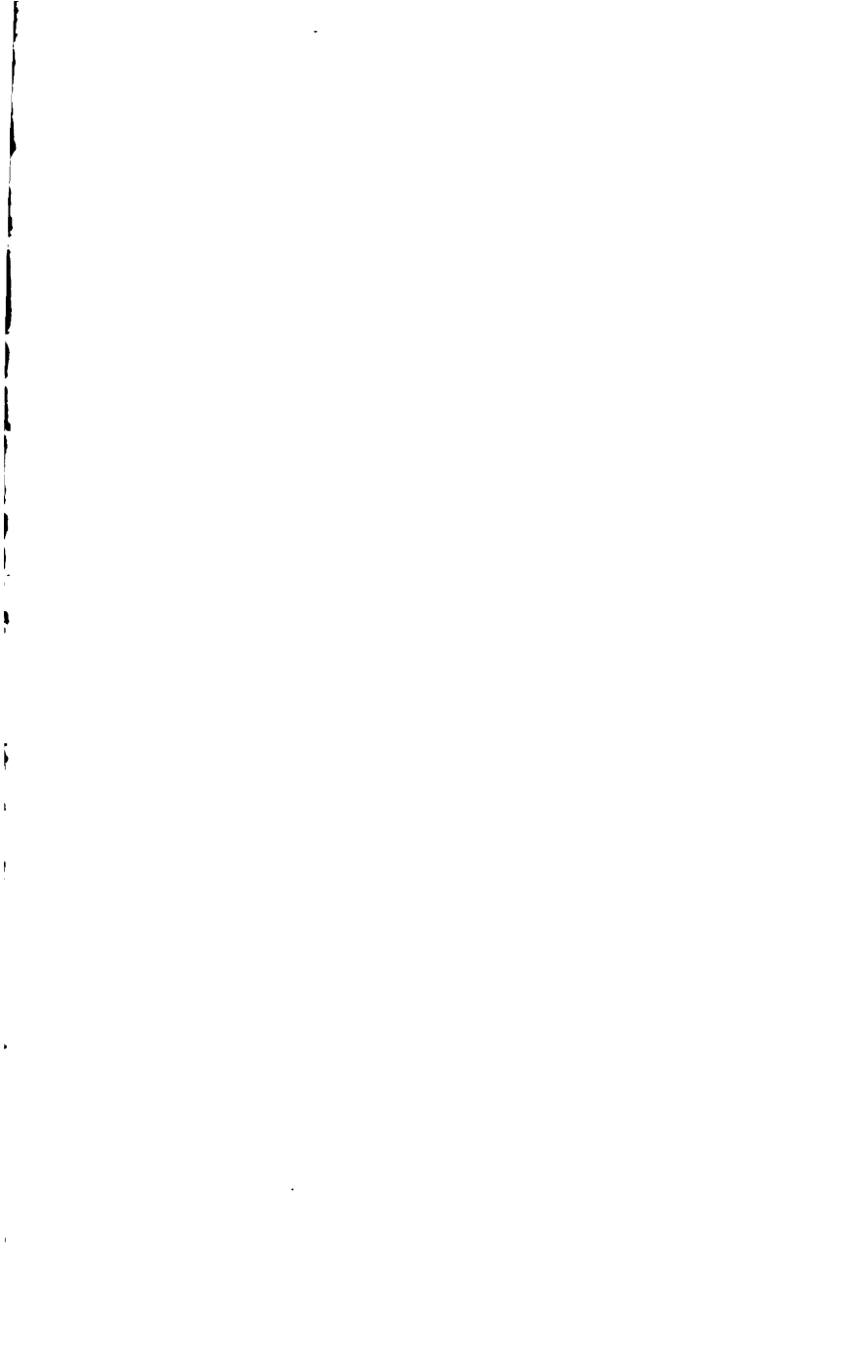
Another day it was a handsome and well-dressed woman of the middle class who supplied the human interest. She fell in among us, panting and evidently suffering from a storm of rage. Her sole luggage consisted of a basket of vegetables. She had never seen any of us before, but, with the curious mixture of secretiveness and confidence of Italians, she told us she had just run away from her husband, and unfolded every particular of conjugal difficulty. This virago had no tears in her composition; she gnashed her teeth and struck out at anyone who offered sympathy, until, worn out, she dropped her head upon her hands. The men patted her knees and jokingly rallied her on her sins: "You are no saint yourself, even if your husband has treated you like a fiend." This address calmed her, and for the rest of the journey she exerted herself to show us her many amiable qualities. But we none of us thought that her husband—"that devil in breeches"—would take the express train in pursuit of her.

Although the "good old coaching days" are over, the sense of adventure has by no means departed from Italian travelling. It is true that you go in a train, but you never can be sure when you may arrive at your destination, or what may happen to the luggage. The other day a friend found a porter reading "Paradise Lost," and spent a happy

moment discussing its beauty, with the result that the trunks remained behind. "Will it not be the same if you get your things twenty-four hours hence?" asked the station-master. The Briton's reply was: "*No*, it will *not* be the same to me"; and the station-master looked puzzled. What a place for a rest cure, once native prejudice was conquered!

Certainly in Italy you never know when a train is likely to start, which must often bewilder the Italian, who makes heroic efforts to keep his watch with the sun. Often he arrives at the station punctually for a seven o'clock train and catches a five A.M. We soon learn too the time it takes, the declamatory conversations entailed, and the documentary evidence needed to show that you really are starting and have paid for the luggage. The other day, to take a ticket for a town three hours up the line, we waited an interminable time. The *Bigliettaio*, ducking his gold-braided cap through the guichet, triumphantly gave us a ticket with the name of the town written on in ink and a piece glued on which he had snipped off by mistake. We were told to be very careful not to lose the mended bit, as it was the most important part of the ticket. And how can one be angry when a broad smile greets a protest, and a *Pazienza, Signora*, is whispered in a soothing tone? Such toylike paraphernalia of travelling in the nineteenth century should only cause mirth. Some day, we are told, Italian railways, now under Government direction, are to become like any other railways, or even better, for

electricity is Italy's great power. We shall then no longer arrive at our destination looking like so many charcoal-burners; but, alas! the feeling of a long pilgrimage to our Mecca will have departed. Already the first blow is dealt—the guard no longer sighs a shrill “toot-toot” through a toy-trumpet and says: “*Pronto, pronto, partenza,*” in that cajoling voice which used to raise the spirits of the hurried traveller.





II

OUR NEW HOME

Tutti non possono avere la casa in piazza

OUR castle is not an invention of enthusiastic pilgrims ; it is a very real thing possessed of a personality made up of immense blocks of brown stone, interminable walls, subterranean galleries, turrets, tower-rooms, prisons, cisterns, moats, draw-bridges, and pitfalls—in short, of all the wonders of the Castle of Otranto.

Some forty years ago an English friend of ours, while on a driving tour in Italy, caught sight of the Fortezza on a rocky height above the small town of Brunella. That day the sun had shone on rivers and mountains, and the whole world rejoiced with the return of spring. The Fortezza was offered to him, together with an acre or so of rocky land and flex wood, for a few pounds, and he bought it, as you might a piece of china. Some years passed before he set to work to put a roof on and make part of it habitable ; the old walls were treated with respect ; nothing was modernised ; and even the ivy, growing everywhere, he forbade to be cut down. The world said that he was collecting castles at the time, and had refused to buy one because he owned sixteen already. A lady once said to a friend of ours that

she knew all about this one . . . "the Consul stumbled upon it in his young youth and bought it right away, and neither he nor anyone else has been able to find it since. It stands on a mountain crag, itself the peak, a monstrous ruin whose walls are fifty feet thick: moufflons graze upon its roofs."

And we who have found it, and now sit high upon the crags, looking down where two rivers embrace the little brown town, live in a dream, with all the added delights of reality. From our bedroom window, as from an eyrie, we watch the morning express pass through with fogged windows, and we are content to see the world go by.

A powerful Genovese nobleman, Adamo Centurione, whose thoughts were wholly turned on warfare and defence, built the castle about 1530. And he built it grim and stern as a key to three valleys. From the living rock his masons cut the blocks of brown stone, and set them up in a square mass of solid masonry, with bastion-shaped walls and a tower at each corner gripping the mountain fast. There is a virile restraint about the Fortezza, an unwillingness to dazzle us, like some beautiful things which capture by storm. The absence of windows in much of its immense wall surface adds to the mysterious fascination, and suggests a giant slumbering secure upon an impregnable rock.

There is no picture to be conjured up here of Renaissance ladies listening in the banqueting hall

to music and to the merry jokes of Court fools, or of their riding out in the clear spring mornings to hunt in the woods. It was the home of soldiers. And, since the days when conquering armies had ceased to appear suddenly in the valleys and bring the castle cannon-balls down about their ears, no one inhabited it except the wild birds and the foxes. During the War of Succession a Spanish army gathered together all its force to take it by assault, but it was only through treachery and under cover of a heavy river mist that they succeeded in driving out the German garrison. Rejoicings were great at the Spanish Court, and a *Te Deum* was sung in the Cathedral of Madrid.

We took possession of the Fortezza very peacefully. One day in March, three years ago, we climbed the mule-track by a grass slope carpeted with violets and the leaves of autumn cyclamen, and reached the terrace just as the sun was setting. A rich glow of colour made the world seem to us like a fairy scene—was it real or should we wake up to find the castle gone? We walked to one of the sentry-boxes which flank the terrace, and looked over the edge into the deep green pools of the Brunella torrent, three hundred feet below; only the ilexes and jutting boulders of rock prevented our heads from reeling.

It is one of the incongruities of the castle that this mule-track should lead to a front door and hall while the carriage-drive lands you at the drawbridge which spans a moat, and here you suddenly plunge

into a tunnel hollowed out of the solid rock and dark as night. Either approach after sunset has its terrors for the citizens of Brunella. To them the place is haunted with spirits of Spanish soldiers and witches, while they also tell of a giant breed of serpents inhabiting the moat. Certainly there are snakes of a harmless kind, and during those first days we found footprints of foxes on the beds of flower-seeds which we had hastily sown on arrival. The nights, too, were full of strange sounds. The mere fact of having to open our front door with a key more than a foot long, which sent echoes vibrating through the hall, attuned our thoughts romantically to our surroundings. The bats flying across the windows, the falcons' metallic watch-cry, the gnawing of rats at the doors, and the puffing noises of the big white owls, who hitherto had reared their families in the cellars, all seemed to protest at our intrusion. We listened as we lay in bed and watched the flames leap up from the great logs, throwing fantastic reflections on to the white walls and vaulted ceiling. I felt horribly afraid—of what I know not—but assumed an air of British courage before the Brunellese.

These first weeks alone, in close companionship with the country about us, were full of unique enjoyment. From two sides of the Fortezza the town is hidden, and the outlook lies towards the mountains, over hills and dales covered with chestnut woods and crowned by half-ruined castles. From the Fortress rock a ridge stretches towards

these woodlands for about a mile, and half-way is a shrine by a group of pine trees. They are very simple and delightful these wayside shrines all over the country : let into the wall, little marble reliefs of the Madonna or some especial saint guard roads and doorways, and in front of them or on the ground below, where arms were not long enough to reach, are tight little bunches of flowers. Sometimes one comes across an occasional chapel half hidden in the velvet shade of chestnut woods : the door is locked, but open barred windows on either side reveal the white-washed gloom and the Crucifix over the altar.

Within sight of our hill-set shrine is a little oak wood, the grass beneath level and close-cropped like a lawn, and through the stems the country is seen on either side, as it falls away in dips and ridges, with streams gushing out and tumbling down through rocky water-courses to the rivers. The valleys are wide, the sky is boundless, the sense of solitude superb. After heavy spring rains the colour deepens and the shadows race and pursue each other up the hills until they reach the snow-wall of the encircling Apennines. Then the marble peaks and precipitous sides of the Apuan range, showing their bare anatomy and fantastic form, seem like vast crested waves chasing on to the land, wave following wave, arrested by some great magic and turned to crystal. Here and there a wisp of cloud floats backwards from the jagged ridges like wind-driven spray. As the evening draws in, they become

suffused with a lustre of rose-purple and gold, to fade with the light to the colour of a Florentine iris. No wonder that Dante immortalised the mythical Augur of the Carrara mountains, and that Michelangelo, enthralled by them, was ready to spend his life in modelling a spur of the range into the likeness of a Colossus which, for all time, should serve as a sign for the sailors of the Mediterranean.

How often have I not returned home dazed by it all, and reached the drawbridge just as the birds are settling to rest with a great flutter and commotion among the ilexes in the moat. A belated blackcap gives a snatch of cheerful song; a blackbird lets fall a sharp warning note. From high up in the sky the kestrels wheel down with shrill cry towards their nests in the castle walls. I grope my way through the tunnel, feeling with a hand along the uneven surface of the rock, and emerge at last into the inner Keep and enter the big and cheerful *Sala*. In a balcony, set in the thickness of the wall and protected by a low parapet full of rock plants, valerian, and thyme, we sit and watch the sun sink behind the hills. We spy out all that goes on in the land—peasants away on the hillsides opposite are carrying home round baskets filled with fodder; the children return with their modest herds; and the heavy carts filled with marble come creaking along the road. As twilight falls smoke begins to pour out of the windows where the evening cake is baking. Gradually all detail is blotted out, and when darkness comes we only hear the sound of the

rivers, the murmur of voices in the *piazza*, and the ringing of the Vesper bell from the old Benedictine belfry.

How can I tell of the joy of it all? I can only fall back upon the Biblical words and say: "It is very good."

III

BRUNELLESE WORKMEN—ULISSE OUR FIRST FRIEND

Povert  non guasta gentilezza

TO make an empty castle habitable in a month is by no means easy, but we rushed at the task blinded by enthusiasm ; we said gaily—"in a month we shall be at peace," but that particular peace to which we referred has not yet been attained after more than three years.

Every morning at sunrise we were awakened by a loud hammering at the great door, which woke the echoes throughout the castle, and a whole army of workmen streamed in—masons, carpenters, mattress-makers and peasants. There were partition walls to be knocked down, walls to be rebuilt where precipices yawned, and endless repairs to be made to windows and doors. Every fire smoked unmercifully, and, as we peered up the colossal chimneys, a sense of impotence seized us at having to grapple with such a habitation. Seeking like the kestrels to gain a home within its rugged walls, our fevered senses sometimes fancied a sardonic smile on the face of the old Fortezza.

A reference to our troubles only produced a snigger among the workmen, who told us that the Consul did not like anything touched because of

l'antichità. But they gave some consolation by saying that, if we objected to being made into smoked herrings, they would see what could be done, although it would be less trouble and expense to do without fires and wear a coat if we felt cold. The chimneys they built proved more quaint than effectual, and, like all their work, were done *a capriccio*, so that one resembled a crown, another a tower, while a third—a veritable *tour de force* shown us with shy pride, is still known as “the hat of the German.”

Having summoned all this host of workmen, we wished that we could raise the spirits of those officers of a bygone century, whose bones lay on the hillside, to marshal them into some kind of order. Seeming to recall the fact that once the Fortezza had belonged to the Brunellesse, each man went his own way and did his task in a manner which seemed good to him. They smiled indulgently at our Northern impatience, and to all our scoldings baffled us with the answers of born diplomatists. One day the carpenters did not come up to their work, which was left in a state of chaos. They casually strolled up after lunch, and, while listening with great good humour to our angry tirade, they begged leave to inform us that So and So had died in the town—had we not heard the bell tolling?—and as the dead man had belonged to their confraternity, it was their duty to follow the procession up the hill to the cemetery. “And, *signori*,” they added, “it is not you who suffer—beyond a little inconvenience perhaps—

but we, who have lost the wages of half a day"; and the tone, in which Emilio said this, was so regretful that our anger changed to merriment.

Certainly we are sometimes unfortunate in the times that we let loose the vials of our wrath, but we did not feel that there could be any excuse for the peasant boy who failed to appear with the donkey, which was bringing up sand for mortar. Our anger was still further kindled when Ferruccio appeared looking not one whit ashamed of himself—indeed, he actually gave me a broad and friendly smile.

"But did the Signori not know that to-day is the feast of our St Anthony, and every animal, even the black animal, saving your presence, is blest with holy water by our *Prevosto*?"

Convicted of such inconceivable ignorance, we hastily retreated.

For three weeks we lived in more than monastic simplicity. Besides two camp beds, there were some seatless chairs, a three-legged table discovered in the cellars, and our half-unpacked box. We so enjoyed ourselves in our new surroundings that we for some days did not notice that the windows had not been cleaned for about twenty years. After this herculean task had been performed the view of the country was quite transformed.

After many false reports our furniture finally arrived from Bergamo, and a tremor of excitement also ran through the town, for they pictured a magnificent array of brand new articles, dear to the heart of the modern Italian.

Our brief experience of life in Sicily, where the foreigner is generally fleeced, made us dread the task of getting our goods up the long steep drive to the drawbridge; but our first experience of the Brunellese proved a pleasant surprise. For three francs we hired a man, a donkey and cart, and, with the addition of a little wine, so far as mankind was concerned, the trouble ended. The only difficulty came from the castle itself; the rock-cut steps leading into the tunnel had to be cut away before many of the things could pass, so that our furniture entered our new home by force. Carpenters and stone-masons cheerfully gave a hand. They looked critically at the *intarsia* chests of drawers, carved *cassoni* and worm-eaten chairs, which, all to pieces and covered with cobwebs, to the unimaginative looked decidedly uninspiring.

"We have often heard that English people like antiquities," was their only comment.

It certainly needed ocular demonstration for them to credit such madness.

"And Orfeo," they told us, "has such beautiful furniture in the town, all quite new and polished; not a scratch on it; you can see your face in it; and there are iron bedsteads, too, with a coloured picture of the Madonna at the head—or else the *Signori* could choose any other saint they pleased."

We spread all our despised belongings on the terrace, soused them with Condyl's fluid, dried them in the sun, and made a holocaust of Renaissance

stuffings. When a wandering upholsterer from Tuscany appeared as if by magic upon the door-step and set promptly to work renovating sofas, putting springs in our beds and chairs, we realized the wisdom of the Italians who never fuss about the morrow—something always turns up as by the saints ordained. And upstairs in the big studio the work grew under our eyes. Out of the windows we could see a constant stream of women walking up the steep short-cut from the Brunella, carrying on their heads immense bundles of wool and vegetable-down for the busy workers within. Our time was passed in painting windows and banisters, laying down Florentine matting on our marble floors and grappling with the workers. The Tuscan upholsterer, excellent at his trade, proved even a greater expert in the art of courtship, and much diplomacy had to be exercised in curbing the indignation of the Brunellesse matrons and their daughters, who threatened to desert if “that ignorant Florentine were not kept in his place.” He ended by absconding with the fruit knives and forks, but not before his work had been completed; and it has always been our consolation that he took plated goods and left our silver spoons and forks untouched. We have never missed anything else; our thrifty servant did once accuse the stone-masons (I now blush to think of it) of absconding with a piece of mottled soap, and for two days she mourned its loss. Again our diplomatic talents, still in their infancy, had to be exerted to the utmost. Some

weeks later we found the soap in a much nibbled condition on a window ledge of the prison window.

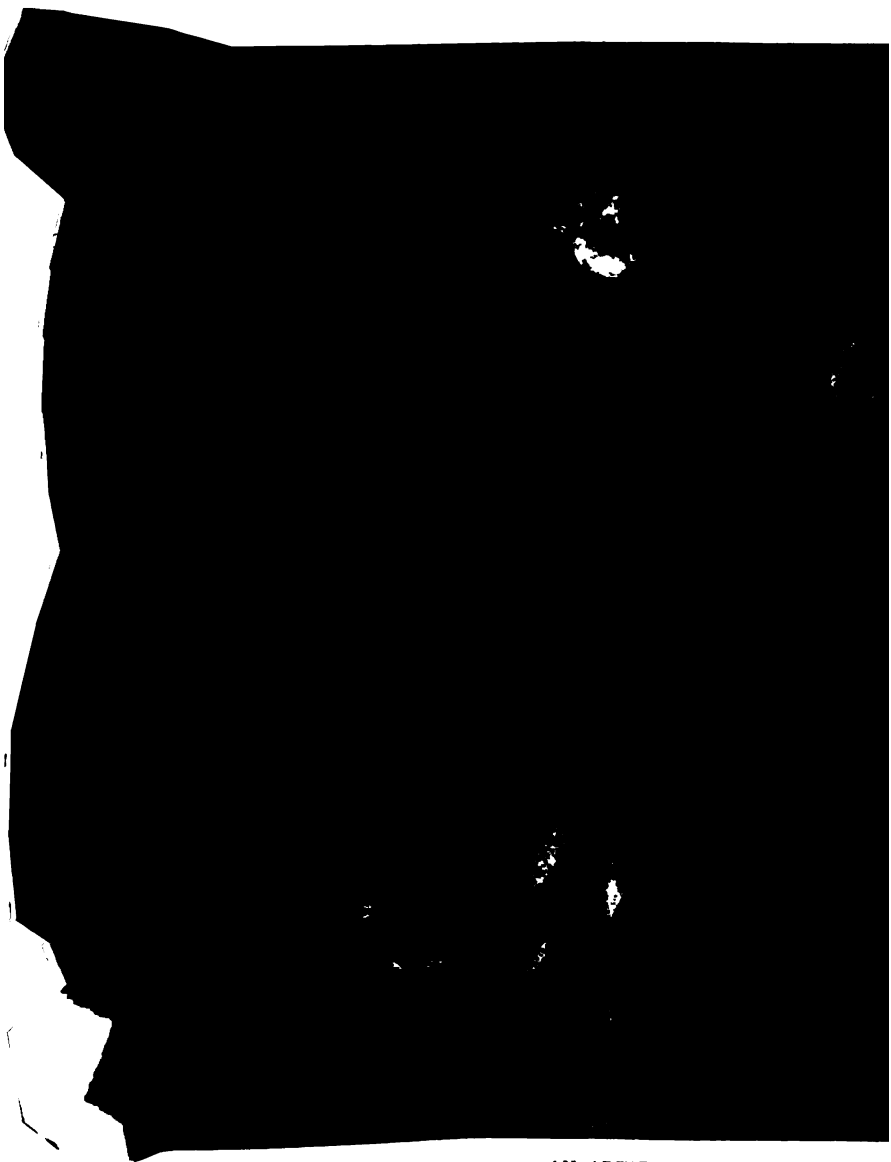
Life so far, if a trifle hurried, was very easy, as the people of Brunella and the country round were delightful to deal with. Hardly a morning passed but someone shyly brought us a present—tight little bunches of flowers, a plant from the garden or from their scanty window boxes, old coins and medals, and innumerable birds. Soon we had several black-birds, tame nightingales which sat on my writing table with their claws in the ink, a mischievous sparrow, solitary thrushes impossible to rear, and a jay which hopped about the house squawking, and finally died from eating a scorpion. Our peasant boy gave us a baby hare, which thrived on milk and water sipped out of a spoon, and finally grew into a fine creature. At night it used to be particularly lively ; we would wake suddenly to find that it had sprung on to the bed, and as it sat there we saw its long ears outlined against the sky. Finally it committed suicide by jumping out of a top window. A sense of household economy saved us from a pair of magnificent young eagles which had been taken from the nest in the Carrara mountains, and I believe the Brunellese were relieved by our refusal. No payments were expected for these presents ; indeed, we once tipped a peasant who had spent several hours in showing us his picturesque village, and I shall never forget his look of pained astonishment as, blushing scarlet, he asked what the money was for.

But we are still as strangers in the land, and the first to become our especial ally was Ulisse the stone-mason; indeed, he has become a friend. When we are away in England he sends us perpetual post-cards with news as to how much water is still in the cistern and how many inches our roses have grown, and they are always signed: "*suo amico Ulisse.*" He takes a romantic interest in the old Fortezza, which he has known intimately since the days when he used to help his mischievous boy-companions to heave the pointed battlements down the hill towards the town. Many an afternoon he now spends searching for material among the bushes on the hillside or in the moat.

Most of our friends had pronounced our new home an abode only fitted for people who could prefer a ruin in Italy to a well-roofed house in comfortable England. The first note of encouragement which came from English lips was from a chance visitor, who said that he liked the "slight element of imprudence" in the whole plan. But Ulisse was the first to make us feel absolutely sane. His admiration for the place is a positive cult.

"And I, Ulisse," he says, nodding his head wisely, "I say that the Fortezza is a Paradise, that it is the most beautiful place that God has created on our earth; *lo dico io.*"

Ulisse has the impressive manner of a minor prophet. His somewhat elementary excursions on a large brass trumpet in the local band also add much to his prestige. Whatever the reason, the



AN ARTIZAN



fact remains that whenever he desires to impart his views, which he does often and at great length, he commands an attentive audience ; we, too, in our difficulties turn to Ulisse the wise.

One day three Brunellese fledglings, calling themselves Anarchists, picknicked in our garden, surrounded by *fiaschi* of wine. They refused to move, and sent us a message that if we were tired of life we might come to them—they had revolvers with them. We took down their names and laid the case before our new friend, who was wrathful and ashamed at the manners of these Brunellese. He must have spoken like a father to them, for next day he brought humble apologies ; they had no recollection of their words, they declared, and only a dim remembrance of the carousal upon the hillside.

On a Sunday morning after Mass he saunters up to have a look at our garden on the ramparts. Sitting there in the sunshine and talking, we build mighty walls and make guard rooms habitable ; but when it comes to settling upon some small improvement to be begun on the morrow, he shakes his head and says we have spent quite enough this year and had much better wait a little. But sometimes we refuse to be bridled, and Ulisse is slung over a precipice to repair a turret, and is made to bring all his mind to bear upon converting a ditch outside our front door into a small terrace or in designing steps of marble cobbles in the fashion of a peacock's tail.

There was a patriarchal feeling around every-

thing: when we wanted sand for the building the donkey was taken down to the river with its wooden panniers and no one asked any questions; from the same river-bed we picked up black, white, and red marble cobbles to make the steps and adorn our entrance, and the stones for building the peasants brought up from the moat or the hillside in baskets. One day we needed some sort of decoration for our entrance, and Ulisse brought us a stone griffin which had been in his back court for years, the spoil of some neighbouring castle: another time a tap was being put up, and again he dived into the town and returned with a stone mask for the spout. He always knows where everything is to be found. Many a time we have wandered off with him in the early morning, when our valley has seemed like a new world in the rising mists, and searched the surrounding farms for *pergola* poles. He bargains, and we mark the logs as ours for three francs a piece to be delivered at our door, and everyone smiles contentedly at the contract.

But Ulisse has his sins, and as they are not characteristic of him alone they must be exposed. He is always bored at the idea of taking careful measurements, preferring to do everything by eye. When we complain that a wall has not been built quite level, looking at it with his head on one side he says, "*Già, già*, it may be so, but it will have more a look of *antichità*." And when we insist upon the work being redone, he casts a wise and compassionate look upon us, remarking that it means

half a day lost, which makes *us* feel the delinquents. But these are only lapses in the excellent work of our good Ulisse. More frequent is his way of taking upon himself to judge whether a piece of work ought really to be finished quickly or not. One day he never turned up, as promised on solemn oath, to finish white-washing the kitchen, and the chaos at last became so unendurable that we put the finishing touches ourselves. A grocer friend, who had strolled in from the town on a visit, set to scrubbing the doors; our cook and her little boys painted the charcoal-range, choosing a squash-strawberry red, while my husband and I did the decorative lines round the bottom of the walls called the *zoccolo*. At three Ulisse strolled in, and was much ruffled to find the work done; at first he thought we had called in another mason. Amazed at our want of faith in him, he exclaimed:

"What! you thought that I was not coming? I am a man of honour and keep my word, and of course I come. An hour's delay—what difference does it make? it is all the same, *è lo stesso*." There was a groan from everyone in the room.

But how can we effectually scold or be long angry with a man, who, of a feast day, leads us by cool wooded paths and through the vineyards across the hills and shows us the wonders of Tuscany and Modena. While we sit on a mountain-top among the oak brush-wood Ulisse recounts his travels, discourses upon the tyranny of popedom in former days, and, with a merry twinkle in his brown eye,

tells how he helped to drive Pio Nono out of Rome. He shows no love for the priests. But he goes to church regularly and escorts the Madonna with music through the town, because, like a true Italian, he likes to conform to the ancient customs of his country.

When we want a letter of introduction, it is Ulisse who provides it. To him we owe the friendship of a delightful Italian admiral who has a summer villa close by. Ulisse assured him that we were *brava gente*, while the admiral, he declared with admiration, was a *galantuomo* and we ought to know each other.

We often pay a surprise visit to his family in Brunella, and are always received with delightful friendliness. Their kitchen is among the neatest in the town : the red-tiled floor glistens, glasses and decanters sparkle, and the innumerable copper pots and pans shine like an Etruscan lady's mirror. The small sitting and dining-room adjoining has a balcony overlooking the street, and at the back a vine arbour juts out above a court into which a dozen neighbours peer ; an Italian does not care much about privacy. Ulisse has decorated his walls with charming arabesques of flowers and foliage, and the whole apartment has much more individual character than most Brunella homes. His wife, Caterina, a gentle little woman, silent and dignified, has the reputation of being an exceptionally clever manageress. The Brunellese are always speculating as to how, with two daughters and sons at home

and only seven francs a day (the sons are not likely to give up all their earnings, and Ulisse is sometimes out of work), they are able to live, and, when occasion offers, "cut quite a figure" in entertaining their friends.

One evening we went down to give a message, and, as the sons were at the *caff * and Ulisse was trumpeting at the local theatre, we were received by Caterina and her two handsome dark-eyed daughters. They immediately produced the inevitable bottle of wine, which in Italian households is like the cup of coffee offered to a guest by the Turk. In a burst of confidence we told Caterina that we always alluded to her as Penelope, and proceeded to tell her the story of that faithful and industrious wife. As she uncorked the bottle, her face wore a rapt expression, and, as the cork flew out with a buzz, she sniffed at the wine, and, with a tragic look, turned to her daughter Gemma.

"*O figlia mia*, the wine is corked!"

Consternation fell upon the family, and no one heard the story of Penelope. By the time another bottle was fetched we had all met again within the magic circle of domestic talk.

IV

OUR SERVANTS

*Se canto tutto il giorno il pan mi manca,
E se non canto mi manca ogni cosa.*

OUR proclamation for a servant met with a dead silence, which surprised me, as so many of the people were very poor. But I afterwards learnt that service is looked upon as a degradation, only to be entered by the unfortunate. The reason is that the middle-class housewife does the cooking and most of the housework herself, the servant being employed to do the rough jobs, to carry water from the well and rinse the clothes in the river. Now an Italian does not mind what hard or menial task she undertakes, so long as it is within doors, but the carrying of water from the well, with the eyes of all the neighbours upon her, seems to mark her humble walk in life. Such pride is always taken in the *Bucato*, that I do not think they mind so much the rinsing and drying of clothes by the river.

When we left the Inn to camp at the Castle I ineffectually struggled in the kitchen and wrestled with a broom, and it was a humiliating sensation to discover my incompetency. I was therefore overjoyed to hear of a servant—a young widow she

turned out to be, possessed of the engaging name of Little Mary. I interviewed her at the local grocer's, or rather I looked at her, liked her gentle brown eyes, soft voice, and quiet, dignified manner, and we walked up the hill together. The *Padrone* nodded approval out of the window, and Mariannina entered into possession of the Fortezza as if she had known us all her life. Until the furniture arrived, she turned old packing-cases into tables, and gave us miraculous meals; she seemed to divine my unspoken desire that she should do her best with the materials at hand, and, above all, not ask any questions. Although English people had only upon the rarest occasions appeared in Brunella, she seemed to think it quite natural to be in our service. She left her last mistress, the wife of a dignitary in the Commune, because she was expected to cook, do the marketing, and be housemaid and wet-nurse for seven pounds a year and scant food. She made a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Madonna, who rules this valley from the hill-top overlooking Brunella, to pray for English *Padroni*, as rumour had reached her that English people were rich and generous. That night, dreaming of a dog, she knew that her prayer was answered, and three days later we appeared in Brunella! Often from her mother's house she had watched me shopping in the town, and thought how nice it would be to live at the Fortezza; but she made no effort to seek an interview with me, and Fate, which she had waited for with the impassive patience of an Eastern, arranged it. "It was destined,

Signora, that I should serve you," she always says. Both in character and appearance Mariannina is a fine type of Italian woman, her well-shaped head, with its mass of shining black hair coiled on high, is set on a column-throat, her clear brown skin has the flush of magnificent health, and she looks at one with a steady, faithful and intelligent gaze. Like the women in many other parts of Italy, especially in the hill districts, she carries everything on her head, once amazing an English man-servant by the calm way in which she hoisted up a trunk and marched downstairs as if it had been an empty band-box. To watch her walk is a revelation of movement; she comes into a room with that forward swinging motion peculiar to the Botticelli Judith, while there is the dignity of the matron about her, as she stands waiting for orders before her daily descent into the Brunella market.

The kitchen is one of the most peaceful spots I know, for nothing ever flusters Mariannina, and yet she gets through an astonishing amount of work. Her rule too is very gentle, but she succeeds in making everyone serve. No one is allowed to stand idle in her domain. If the shoemaker happens to linger after coming up for an order, he is given potatoes to peel or sent to feed the rabbits; and I have found the stone-masons, Ulisse and his son Achimede at their head, shelling peas in the hall while waiting for a storm to pass over.

Mariannina always rises at five, and during those

first days when there was no furniture to clean and only ourselves to wait on, she used to sit and crochet laces for the decoration of our linen, while she waited for the water to boil. Aided by her I have stocked the cupboards with delightful linen made on a loom, and everything is embroidered with enormous initials, like the chimneys, done *a capriccio*. All the intellects of Brunella gathered together to design us a "double V," and the result was everything that a *hausfrau*, with a taste for the unusual, could desire.

Mariannina is not loved in the town; to begin with she comes from Carrara, and is therefore regarded as a stranger—a *forestiere*—and somewhat in the light of an intruder, and besides, they have laid a wager that she would not stay with us for more than a week, as, besides the work being too hard, she was not capable of cooking to our taste. Their anger therefore rises when they see "*quella forestiera*" descend smiling and happy into the town, entirely trusted by her *Padrona*. They revenge themselves by remarking, with an air of condolence, how fat she is getting, entirely losing her figure since she has been at the Fortezza, thereby insinuating that she does no work and eats more of her share of good things. Unmoved, she answers them with a smile: "A fat cat does honour to its home."

When one day we were waylaid at a local shop to have unfolded for us the true character of "that widow," as they called Mariannina, we thought

ourselves back in the Middle Ages of party feud. The shopman and a friend stood behind the counter, their wives sat with hands folded beneath their aprons and a shocked and grieved expression upon their faces. First of all they let fall dark hints, then they said how upset they were at what they felt it their duty to tell us, for their affection for us was so immense, and, indeed, everyone praised our exceeding virtue, etc., etc. And was it not painful for them to see the rest of the townspeople pointing at the *Signora* whenever she came into the town with her two servants, and hear them say: "Here comes Christ between the thieves"?

Then they came to facts: Mariannina was accused of leaving half the marketing at her mother's house when she looked in for a few minutes to see her boys.

"And, oh! *Signora*, that is not the worst—that widow has a lover, a man who is going to be married next week. It is certain there will be a scandal"; and I thought I detected a smile of anticipation.

We breathed more freely when we got into the air, but all the way home we seemed to see the four scandal-mongers, sitting and whispering in the little dark shop, sanctimoniously self-righteous and pleased with their day's work.

In fairness to all parties concerned, for many a day, while Mariannina was out of the kitchen, I weighed everything and kept a strict watch, but not a farthing's loss could I discover anywhere. As for

her accounts, they are a marvel of accuracy and queer spelling. Writing and sums do not come easy to her, and, as she sits at the table setting down the expenses of the day, she looks as solemn as a Notary. As for the other charge, it proved quite inaccurate, a story set about by the jealous girl because her lover, who had known Mariannina since they were children, admired her eyes, and on one occasion gave her a pair of boots for one of her boys. In return Mariannina bought him a box of cigars at the fair, which soon provided much talk in the town. Her so-called rival upbraided her in the public *Piazza*, and with dramatic gesture threw the offending cigars down a cesspool. Mariannina screamed out her innocence to a crowd of spectators and then dissolved into tears, which was the safest ending to such a scene.

To-day all this seems of the far-away past, and Mariannina has now gained the respect of her enemies; but she will never be really liked because she keeps too proudly to herself and never gossips. Besides this, she is sometimes inclined, in her gentle, humorous way, to take a rise out of her neighbours. Such common sense and shrewd judgment of people as she shows came as a surprise from one with such a calm Madonna-like countenance.

I often think that the perpetual watchful and critical eye of the Brunellesse has a wondrous effect upon both our maidens, spurring them on to wondrous feats; and certainly, from

the spectator's point of view, it adds a zest to life.

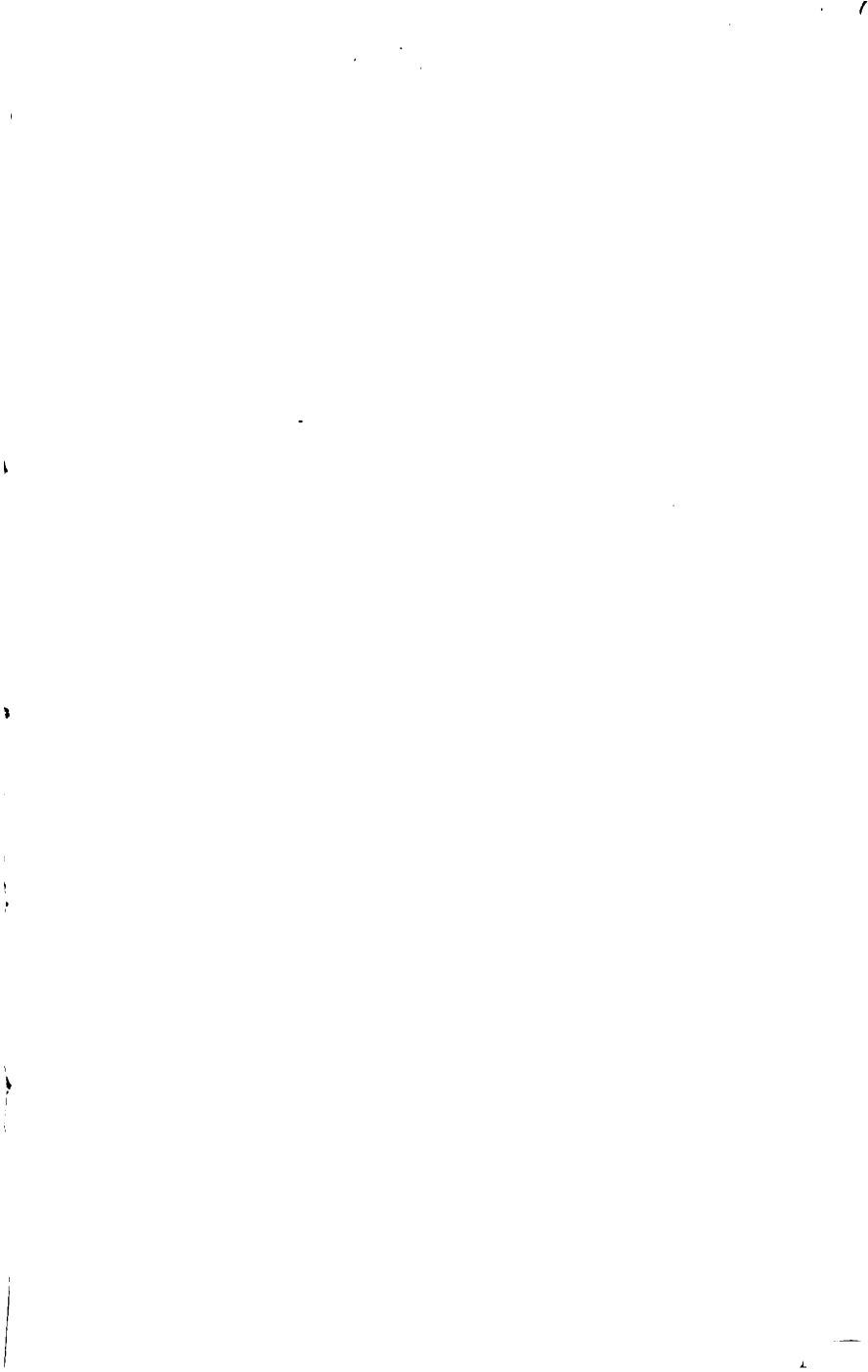
Where one servant is needed to run an Italian house, two are necessary to attend to the endless wants of English people, who require breakfast instead of a cup of coffee and a slice of dry bread, tea besides luncheon, and a hot dinner instead of cold meat and salad, or hard-boiled eggs. So before many months had passed, Adelina, a young sister, was engaged. Even after nearly three years' service with us she is still amazed by English ways, and it is quite a little comedy to witness the calm superiority of Mariannina, who boasts the experience of six months in England, and talks as if the world were now an open book to her. Adelina, listening to her discourse upon the methods of obtaining hot water, and the arrival of tradesmen at the back-door in that "land of comfort," opens wide her eyes and thinks the age of miracles has not yet passed away. She is a great contrast to her well-balanced sister, who is inclined to be irritated by her quicksilver temperament, and at times administers a slap such as a cat gives to her kittens. At ordinary times Adelina is extremely shy and nervous, nearly jumping out of her skin at a clap of thunder, and, if suddenly called, turns as pale as a ghost, immediately thinking that some disaster has happened to her family. Being delightfully natural she often surprises us with gleams of a vivid personality, as when the polyphon arrived for a certain small person, and she suddenly

began to dance to the tune of "My Queen." She appeared like a sprite from out of the woods, alert, graceful, and keenly alive. Her dramatic talents, which have the element in them of the Tuscan *Stenterello*, are much appreciated by her family and her friends in the town, who always declare that she would make a valuable addition to a company of strolling players. Her simplicity and childishness gives piquancy to her remarks. The other day she burst into my room to ask me to explain exactly what an island was. As I gave the usual time-honoured definition her eyes grew more and more startled: "But, *Signora*," she asked, "is it not a very dangerous thing to live on a piece of land entirely surrounded by water? I think I would rather not come with you to England this year." Adelina was thinking of those islets of sand in the river-bed below our windows, which are for ever shifting as the waters rise in flood. For things unseen her mind revolves in the groove of a mediæval chronicler. But round the experiences of everyday life Adelina can weave a world of romance, as when she returned from seeing King Victor Emanuel riding through a neighbouring city surrounded by his cuirassiers, and she described them all as kings: "So many kings there were from every part of the world." Her usually plain face lights up with enthusiasm, her big grey eyes flash, and she visualizes such a scene for us in a well-selected narrative, amply illustrated by dramatic gestures. "*A Lei*," says Adelina, addressing us

from the middle of the room, and then pausing as if she were about to announce a change in the Ministry. At first she used to make me jump, but now I like it, for it has about it the ring of a Salutation.

She has all the amusing vanity of a child joined with native shrewdness. In her pride of the Fortezza, I believe she would like us to sit all day on a golden seat dressed in our best, and pretend to be living in a fairy kingdom. Certainly she is always distressed when I walk out in a tweed skirt, and wants me to trail through the town in a festal garment. Once when I was going to attend a christening she prepared an evening gown, and was terribly disappointed that I did not wear it. Like her neighbours, she thinks that to dress simply to pass through the town and actually wear a silk blouse in the evening, with only a husband to see you, is turning things upside down. In olden days she has starved herself to buy a smart petticoat, but now she can afford to give her friends a surprise. "What are you going to wear next Sunday at the Carnival *Veglione*, Adelina?" they ask, and she carelessly answers: "Oh, nothing particular, only my blue cotton." When she appears in an old white silk blouse which she has cleverly cleaned and renovated, her friends, she tells me, are quite cross with envy.

But while desirous that we and our household should dazzle the neighbours, Adelina is equally anxious that it should be done economically. She





ADELINA

severely criticises our keeping good wine in *fiaschi*. "Why," she asks me, "do you not bottle it; when a guest comes, a bottle is uncorked and thus we cut a good figure and spend very little—*figuriamo di molto e spendiamo poco*." But at times her practical mind is a little disconcerting. It is, for instance, difficult to make her understand why one sometimes does things or keeps things which do not produce any material advantage. She highly disapproves of the tame gazelle which inhabits the moat, and gravely asked me why we gave it so much Indian corn and sweet chestnut flour, which all cost money—"did we hope it would get much bigger and fatter and make a good roast?"

Never set your heart upon having a conventional household in Italy; even with "trained servants" something unusual is sure to happen. Some unconventionalities do not signify. Adelina still comes singing blithely into the *Sala* to lay the cloth; every now and again she steps back, and, with her head on one side, observes the artistic effect of oranges and prunes decorated with bay leaves. She carries in a dish of *maccheroni* on a brass salver held high on an upturned hand, as if she were bringing us the head of Holofernes.

In the morning a drowsy guest is at first alarmed to see Adelina appear with a volume of steam arising apparently out of her head; she kneels down and lifts a cauldron of boiling water to the ground. I could write a volume on the variety of ways she

does the same piece of work each day : the different positions in which the bath is situated in the room and the various methods of laying out our clothes in the evening. She is like an artist who cannot, if she would, copy one of her works of art. Indeed, she always refers to herself and family as *artisti*, which recalls the day when nearly all artisans were artists — now they are only *artigiani*.

At first Adelina treated us to an insight into the ordinary spring cleaning of an Italian household. Great personal preparations were made for the event ; she tied a yellow handkerchief round her head, borrowed a large painting apron and pinned up her skirts coquettishly to one side, showing her crimson stockings and pointed wooden shoes. She rolled the matting up and carried it on her head to the terrace, where she spread it in the sun and cleaned it with a damp cloth. Indeed, everything is bundled daily into the sun—our window sills often resembling a second-hand clothes shop. Then Adelina threw buckets of water on to the stone floors, and, with a big broom, made of millet stalks, swept the surging waves of water towards the window and out through a little hole of the balcony. There was something in this wholesale cleaning which refreshed us—something Herculean about it—but, as it was distinctly dangerous to sit or sleep in the rooms for several days afterwards, we have since been obliged to abandon the method.

"In England," remarks Adelina, "I hear that it is customary to kneel down to sweep, as if one were praying, and this is only done in the morning; it must all be very different out there in the North."

Yes, it is so different that it would be sheer waste of time to mould an Italian on the methodical English method; all you can do is to put a drag on their inspirations. An Italian servant catches up a broom whenever the spirit moves her, and chooses strange moments to rub up copper and brass utensils with wood ashes and lemon juice, which are kept specklessly clean; but the same result might be obtained in less time by more method. A great deal of admiration and ejaculation is always needed by the enthusiastic Adelina.

"Please come, *Signora*," she begs, "and see how I have cleaned the *Sala*; it shines like a looking-glass enough to dazzle one. When the wife of the *Signor Segretario* came up on Sunday she was amazed at the way I kept the place. Indeed, when I think of all that I have learnt in these two years, I feel that it is very wonderful." After a speech of this sort it is a little difficult to point out that the corners of the room have been unvisited, the top of the chimney-piece undusted, and the globe polish left on the door handles. It would seem, indeed, ungrateful, and the awakening has to be of a very gradual nature. Try giving a severe British lecture and your Southern servant will weep and immediately want to die; her depression will be so acute that

for the rest of the day nothing but wailing will be performed. But a right middle course is soon found, wherein a little of the diplomacy of the land is employed; having given vent to your reproofs and suggestions of amendments, end up your discourse with a hearty compliment on something which has been well and ably done.

Thus with a little oiling the wheels work. I must say that there is no more willing, faithful, hard-working, affectionate and cheerful servant than an Italian. But you must be prepared to be very much like the hen with her chickens, and not grumble at unconventionalities. Sometimes we even realise their benefits. Italians are never good at foreseeing events: they come at Christmas time to tell you that there is no coal in the house, or no milk, just as you are sitting down to tea. I remember how amused a friend from England was to see Mariannina, regardless of our presence, rush into the *Sala* and fling open the windows, to shout to the peasant three hundred feet below: "Oh! Ferruccio," with a long-drawn wail at the end of the name. In a few minutes the boy came springing up the rocks among the irises with a pail of fresh milk. One summer's day I came into the kitchen to make wild strawberry jam, and found the tailor and the baker waiting to serenade me; and it seemed quite natural, and was very pleasant, to stir my cauldrons to the accompaniment of flute and guitar.

But there were limits at which even my Italianized mind rebelled. I objected to Mariannina stirring

the soup with my silver paper-knife, when the wooden spoons could not be found, or giving the chickens their food in our best flower vase ; still more did we cry out, when she pulled up our rosemary cuttings to flavour the roast with, and Adelina brushed my skirts with my husband's hair-brushes, and, in a fit of economy, aired the clothes before the drawing-room fire. Perhaps their most irritating fault, shared with many Italians, is a habit of putting everything down to Fate. In this old castle they have the additional recourse of spirits ; if anything is found broken or is tidied away beyond recall, they declare that *i spiriti della Fortezza* are the culprits, and there the matter is supposed to end. It comes from a certain laziness of mind ; they will work themselves to the bone, but conceive it a labour to go two yards out of their way to fetch a poker when a golf-club, happening to be at hand, will perform the office equally well.

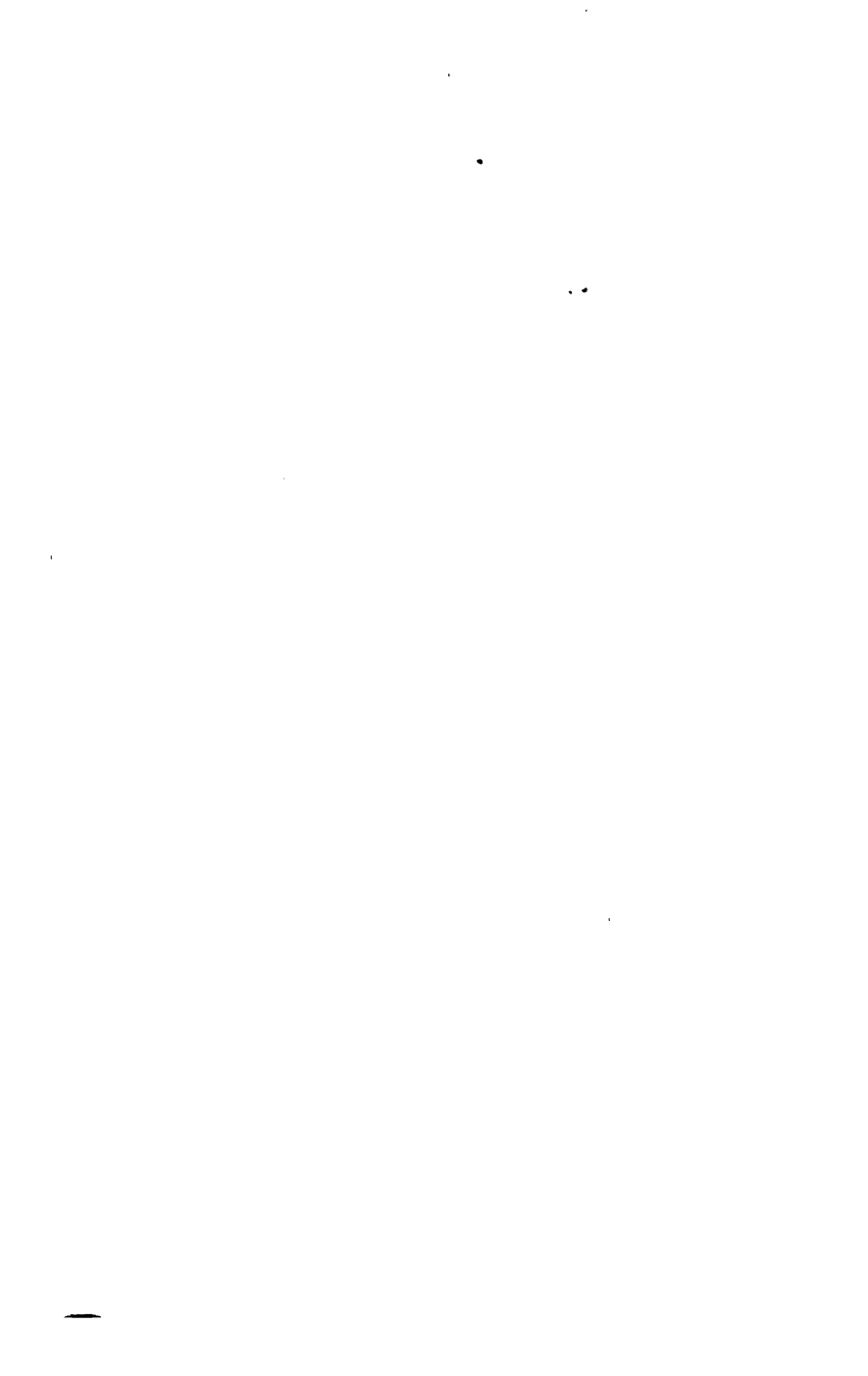
The account of Italian servants would not be complete without speaking of the *Bucato*, which is the great pride of every good housewife. Washing day is the great event of the fortnight, when our servants deem themselves of immense importance and pay little heed to us. Certainly *il Bucato* is an impressive ceremony. When the linen has been well soaped on a marble slab, it is pressed into an immense earthenware jar called a *conca*, such as are used for lemon trees in a Tuscan garden. This stands by the hooded fireplace of the ironing-room ; a rough cloth is spread over the linen, and wood

ashes are strewn thickly on top. Every time that the cauldron of water, hung by a chain over the fire, boils, it is poured over the clothes, and, percolating through, runs out through a hole at the bottom of the *conca*. After about five hours the water runs out very hot, the sign that the *Bucato* is done. Lye mixed with the boiling water, together with the wood ashes, takes out all stains. In this way one escapes the boiling of linen, which is so ruinous, but of course it is a much lengthier process than our own. The linen is next carried in baskets to the river, where it is rinsed, and, on sunny days, dried, stretched and folded on the shingle. There are always merry groups of women down by the river, even on a Sunday. They roll their skirt up round their hips, showing only a white petticoat, and stand in the water swinging the clothes to and fro as they chat and sing and laugh. A good deal of rivalry ensues: Adelina comes back beaming to relate how the Signora So and So had passed by and admired the beauty of our linen—it was white as snow, and, indeed, she could not understand how Mariannina and Adelina managed to do the washing so well.

The third addition to our household during the first six months was a “butler” of fourteen. As Giovanni aptly expressed it, he “penetrated” into the castle by the tunnel entrance the day our furniture arrived, and “took such a fancy to us” that he begged to be allowed to serve us all his life. Without any invitation on our part he appeared

THE BUCATO





every day to help in the general confusion. At night he came into the *Sala*, cap in hand, to wish us *buon riposo*, insisting upon shaking hands with great fervour and occasionally making a choice speech upon the pleasure it gave him to work for us. The Brunellesse, smoking in the piazza, saw a will o' the wisp darting down the hill between the ilexes and, again, the murmur went round of—*spiriti*. When Giovanni emerged at a run swinging a small lantern, they all hailed him as a most courageous fellow, and henceforth he insinuated to us the heroic light in which he stood. There was only one thing in the world, he declared, which frightened him—serpents. Whenever we returned home after a long day's excursion, he and the handmaidens had always some marvellous tale to relate of the harmless grass snakes on our hill-side, which sometimes were "as big as lions and opened their mouths like a dragon." Giovanni had a sure method of escape, taught him by some wise man, which was to run round and round in ever-widening circles when one of these terrible animals appeared.

Giovanni's people were once well-to-do. His mother's family still own a fine mediæval castle and good farms in the neighbourhood; but her husband was a loafer, and after spending all her dowry, went off to America leaving her to bring up three boys and a girl. She has a refined and spiritual face and big, sorrowful eyes; the simple black dress she always wears and the black lace scarf on her head give her the appearance of a beautiful nun. Two

sons are working well, but Giovanni from infancy has always done the unexpected. Possessed of a pretty tenor voice, he used to like to hear himself intone the responses at High Mass and Benediction. He next imagined that he had a vocation for the religious life, and went off to a monastery near Genoa, where he declares, in order to try his patience, he was made to sweep the floor with a handless broom, and draw water out of the well in a sieve. His patience lasted three days. His next exploit was singing at a *caff * in Brunella, "only for glory," as he told us, while his mother had nothing to live on except the spasmodic gifts of her relations, who often would forget her existence altogether.

Giovanni refused to be "trained" on any known system. He had his own original way of cleaning knives and forks, which he preferred to do sitting on the drawbridge surrounded by Brunellese boys, who thought him very clever and busy. He was, like most of his countrymen, very particular about his personal appearance. The wearing of a new suit of clothes seriously impeded his progress in waiting at table, as there was much lingering before the glass and adjusting of collar and cuffs. One day when we were expecting guests to lunch he spent the morning at the barber's, returning with his head like a convict (the ideal of smartness in Italy); and was much surprised by our expostulating at his suspension of labour.

"One day I will sing to you," said Giovanni; "I sing very well."

"It is true," murmured the servants.

On a warm May evening we dined out of doors, and three Brunellese, with flute, guitar and trombone, came to show off their powers and accompany Giovanni. When the baker, seated on the grass between his companions, the light of the *lucerne* full on his face, began to play a sentimental air on the flute, we half expected to see the castle serpents, with heads erect, surround them in a ring. Throughout the music Giovanni was restless. At last his turn came to pour out a tale of love and suffering. Walking up and down the narrow terrace above us, he flung out his tenor notes into the still night, and his voice quavered as he sang of the forgotten lover. At moments he stood still, his gaze fixed in space, and, as his notes mounted, an expression of triumph came into his young face. Then he would begin to walk again, declaiming in effective gestures the tragedy of his song, or, as he felt the desire of a dramatic pause in the song, he motioned a softening and a slackening of speed to the musicians with the authority of a band conductor. With his singing he had assumed the air of the artist, and the musicians were made to sink back into the rôle of accompanists.

I can guess what the reader is thinking—that we chose our cook because she walked like a goddess, our housemaid for her dancing and our butler for his voice. But fortune sometimes favours the vague. Two years have now passed, and Adelina can dust as well as dance, Mariannina cooks admirably, and

Giovanni . . . ah, Giovanni! He is now "valet" to a *Signor Ingegnere*, and we see him on the balcony outside his master's sitting-room reading the newspaper and smoking cigarettes.

"And he is always a little mischief," says his mother.

V

MARKETING

Quando i furbi vanno in processione il diavolo porta la croce

HOUSE-KEEPING in Italy is like a game, which has to be carefully followed each day. The bourgeois mind is keenly interested in the price of things, and, in order to keep my household up to the mark, I too have to appear thrilled by the news that cabbages now cost a halfpenny each and fresh eggs have fallen to sevenpence a dozen. During our first months at the castle a good procession of vendors used to come up to us. Sometimes on our way down to breakfast we used to find a peasant-woman seated upon the hall steps surrounded by dozens of thin chickens with their legs tied together and clucking violently. She pinched the poor fowls to prove how fat they were, and while we bargained, Giovanni would amuse himself by scribbling the prices down on the newly-painted banisters. Then would follow men with baskets of apples, cheese and eggs, and women from the hills above us carrying immense bundles of brushwood on their heads, which they dumped down at our feet, refusing to go until we had bought them. At last our guard-towers became so full of poultry, the cellars so choked with brushwood, and the larder so overladen

with cheeses that, our patience exhausted, we locked all the gates and cried *Via* from the windows. Peace then reigned and my house-budget diminished. Of course these vendors got the better of us, like the man (such a nice man!) who gave us half weight in a large quantity of wood which we bought from him. Then there was the one-eyed charcoal-burner who put stones in the bottom of his sacks, and, with apparent carelessness, his foot on the rope which tied the sack of charcoal to the weighing machine. In the long run this sort of dealing does not pay them, but an Italian can rarely resist the temptation of being *furbo*. If we mention these facts to Italian friends, remarking that we are often ashamed to convict an apparently worthy person of theft, they only laugh and say: "Never trust your neighbour; the neighbour does not expect it." The unlettered peasant woman or artisan's wife often comes off badly in the battle with the local tradesmen, whom she allows to write down the items of her purchases in a weekly book. It happens more than once that she pays the same bill over and over again. It seems as if their child-like admiration for those, who can read and can understand the mystical signs of the weighing machine, gives them faith in the man who is ready to cheat them at every turn. Constantly people came in to Paolo's Co-operative Railway Stores to ask him to weigh the goods they have just purchased, for his weighing machine is the only one above suspicion in the town. The wide-awake bourgeoisie can fight her own battle over the



DAILY MARKETING

counter, enjoy it, and come off triumphant, like Signora Fortunata, who turned the butcher's scales upside down and tore off the weights which were cunningly plastered on to the bottom. She is a little woman of great spirit, and spake her mind out so loud that all the neighbours came in to see what was the matter, while the butcher listened to her admirable sermon without a word of protest.

Happily they are brilliant exceptions : our masons and carpenters, for instance, and the shoemaker, who expressed amazement to Mariannina that we had not taken anything off his bill. Although his charges seem absurdly low, we now feel bound to bargain with him, for our reputation is at stake. It is an error like this which makes our servants and the Brunellese think us very rich. Added to this they know that we make jam, eat meat sometimes twice a day, grow millions of flowers in our garden, and oh ! ye Saints, what extravagance ! sweet peas which we cannot eat ! Thus it happened that one day, when I was in the kitchen rolling out some suet crust, Mariannina startled me with the following serious remark and question :

" *Signora*, I do not believe that this room would hold all the gold which you and the *Padrone* possess. Are there *any* people in England richer than you ? "

Notwithstanding the unfortunate impression we seem to make of our infinite wealth, Mariannina

soon took up the burden of bargaining in my stead, and each year I leave still more to her care and discretion. In the early morning she starts with a few francs in a little purse hung at her neck, upon a round of the shops, and a great battle ensues, for the Brunellese, like every other Italian tradesman, thinks that English people ought to pay double for their wares. The effulgence of the "Milord" of the time of Byron still lingers and lends a lustre to even the humble traveller.

Perhaps it is not unwillingly that Mariannina enters into the arena, for, as we have previously explained, she does not love the Brunellese, and, besides, the average Italian delights in marketing and bargaining, and, were the tradesmen to call at the door, half the zest of life would depart. The good bourgeoisie sallies forth herself to market, her servant, if she is prosperous enough to possess one, carrying the basket and a large cotton handkerchief which seems miraculously elastic. The choosing of a cabbage or a pound of meat calls forth a power of careful judgment worthy of a minister of state. What a sharp eye the *Signora* keeps on the weighing machine; she is on tenter hooks all the time lest a different bunch of carrots than the one she has chosen should be slipped into her bundle, and how she beats down the price of everything in shrill rapid tones! Even now I sometimes think a violent quarrel is taking place between the stout woman at the fruit and vegetable store and the eager purchaser; both are flushed

and hoarse, and, oblivious of all around them, gesticulate violently, until the very cabbages seem to become electrified. The deal is over; *Buon giorno*, says the market-woman in her sweetest tones, settling herself once more in her chair, and the lady, picking up her skirts fastidiously, nods and smiles with beaming friendliness. Neither would willingly go without that slight alleviation to the dulness of the day. If you were not to bargain, and bargain with all your soul, the shopman or the itinerant vendor would consider himself defrauded of his legitimate entertainment, and, further, would have an uncomfortable feeling to the end of his life than he might have got even a higher price out of you than he asked. The fishmongers opposite beckon and call and point to their strange-looking fish laid out on the marble counters. There are Jean Dorés, red and grey mullet of dazzling colours, the stout small fish with a golden throat called an *Orata*, small cray-fish and big prawns, fresh sardines, anchovies, and many curious sea delicacies, such as cuttlefish and *Bianchetti*, which, from a distance, look like a round gelatinous fish possessed of a million eyes, but in reality is a very diminutive baby fish which is eaten in croquets. Of course Italians know the price of everything; and as their keen eyes rove up and down the endless rows of stalls, they refuse to be flustered even by the wary fishmonger. At seaports I have often seen the naval officers themselves inspecting and buying with great caution and carrying home their wares in

a newspaper parcel. We English are the fated victims. Instead of anchovies a lot of curious little coarse fish are shovelled in among them into the weighing machine. The purchaser protests.

"But, *Signora!* these are delicacies and of very rare quality."

"Too rare," replies the Englishwoman; and then he gives in with a look of well-assumed pity for such stubborn ignorance.

One day a Brunellese happened to be shopping for us, and bought some fish at an Italian's price. When it transpired accidentally who it was for, the man set up a tragic wail.

"Oh! had I known for whom you were buying, I should have asked double."

Our friend was very irate at such an idea, but we laughed heartily at the mingled simplicity and cunning of the fishmonger:

The Italian system of marketing seems to me an excellent one, as it enables the cook or the mistress herself to choose what happens that morning to be best and of moderate price. After six in the morning the best has already been carried off. How astonished an English cook would be were her mistress to order a luncheon dish of half a dozen chicken breasts served with alternate slices of tongue and ham. If not exactly a bourgeois dish, it is by no means an unusual one in Italy, where, in the big markets, chickens are divided up and a cook can choose a collection of breasts, wings

or legs, according to the length of his master's purse. Cooked sausage meat and galantine can also be bought at any good grocer, even in the small towns. The custom may have arisen from the fact that Italians never indulge in big joints or in a quantity of food at a time, for the long summer makes it difficult to keep food fresh, and even during the winter a sudden *scirocco* would soon turn everything bad in the larder. An unexpected traveller arriving late at night at a friend's house would in all probability find nothing to eat but some eggs, and, if lucky, some bread.

At the big markets, such as Genoa, Florence, Rome and Naples there is a varied supply of game and vegetables. The sheltered market gardens round Naples supply the first fruits, though the warm slopes of Fiesole come not so very far behind. On the western shores of Italy quails are caught in great numbers in their flight from Egypt to the north, and the Maremma supplies the wild boar, which is looked upon as a luxury. I have even seen a stag offered to customers, if each one would consent to buy a few slices. Then there are plenty of wild duck, snipe, bec-fique, and, alas! endless variety of singing birds—siskins, greenfinches, blackbirds are hawked about, their little necks looped together. There is nothing that an Italian will not eat. And what a brilliant scene is an Italian market! Memories of the most striking pass through my mind like a kaleidoscope of colour and movement: Ravenna in its setting of beautiful

old palaces ; that of Lucca behind the jewellers' shops, where we can trace at a glance the ancient amphitheatre ; the Campo dei Fiori by Pompey's theatre in Rome, whose name alone conjures up a picture ; and the lagunes of Venice, which seem at times one vast market-place as the boats come across laden with fruit and vegetables. But while the market of every Italian town has its own individual charm, which is one's delight to search out, they all possess the same broad characteristics.

Anything can be bought at an Italian market, even household linen and fine underclothing embroidered with coronets and flowers, which have come out of a trousseau of some lady fallen upon evil days. You may buy fried fish and see it turned in the frizzling oil by an imposing cook in white cap and apron ; or in winter-time there is always chestnut cake, which is cut with a string to show how nice and sticky it is. Then as the month of May comes in the public scribe sets up his tent in some cool corner of the square ; one curtain is folded back, and in the dim light he is seen busily writing at the dictation of some peasant man or woman, artisans too maybe, who willingly exchange a few halfpence for the wonderful letter they cannot read. The scribe is most discreet, and treats the love letters and the business letters with the same professional air. Sometimes he is called upon to exert his muse, for a letter in verse is by no means an uncommon missive between



A MARKET

Italian lovers, and then a few more pence are gained.

The market women sit under huge umbrellas or wide-spreading awnings with a stall at their side and baskets at their feet, and they peacefully sit and crochet lace, or knit in the intervals of bargaining. Even in the shade the medley of colour is often dazzling: there are pumpkins and gourds of every shape and size, hanging bunches of the small tree tomato and little peppers, bundles of cardoons a yard long, baskets piled high with artichoke, others full of oranges and mandarines, or the strange egg-plant with its glossy purple skin. In the autumn the colour of the *piazza* in some of the bigger towns is added to by the persimmon fruit, which are like balls of fiery gold, and of large peppers grotesque in shape and various in their changing shades of crimson, scarlet, emerald-green, purple and yellow.

In the spring-time when the foreigners flock, men and women pass to and fro carrying baskets on their heads full of flowers: immense boughs of mimosa, sprays of roses, bunches of violets and wild tulips, and, later, the great white lilies. For the Italian there are paper carnations stuck in a large potato to form a bristling bunch; and boys thrust out for sale strings of onions and bunches of garlic.

One day I stopped to watch a woman, who was seated on an upturned basket by her stall of immense Sicilian oranges, busily engaged in feeding

a sparrow, which was tied to her apron by a string. Seeing my kodak she called out :

“Wait a moment, I will show you something worth photographing;” and lifting up a curtain she snatched from under the stall a baby of a few months old. As she held it up in front of her its loose white gown got all rucked up about its neck, and the most amazing limbs were displayed to an admiring crowd.

“What a baby!” cried the mother in an excited voice; “what a marvellous creature she is! Have any of you ever seen such a child? *un vero stupore non è vero?*”

The other day I was puzzled by unfamiliar sounds in the hall, a sound of scraping and a great rustling of feathers, which seemed to denote a certain sense of importance felt by the owner. Presently the door opened, and Mariannina entered followed by a turkey, which stalked solemnly round the room and finally planted itself in front of the fire. A keen discussion of its points ensued: did I think three francs and a half too much to have paid for the bird? Of course three francs and a half were always three francs and a half, and certainly it was not over fat; and with an expression of the expert on her face she pinched the turkey, which caused it to shift from one leg to the other.

“But then,” continued Mariannina, with a serious air, as if she were solving a problem, “we can stuff it with maize and acorns—there is time before

Christmas—and when I have finished the washing up in the afternoon I can take it to walk in the moat, and do my crochet.”

A charming domestic scene, I thought, and not dear at the price. So the turkey took up its quarters partly in a guard-tower and partly on the terrace, occasionally hopping into the hall and the kitchen. Two days later it disappeared: it was seen to drop off from the terrace wall and waddle off down the hill. Ferruccio gave breathless chase; but as he had waited a moment to finish some wood-sawing, the turkey won the race. In sign of mourning Mariannina covered her head with a large shawl and sat in the balcony of the work-room picking spinach. Her eyes were red and swollen. I asked anxiously after her health.

“*No, Signora*, I am not ill, but the loss of the turkey has upset me. When finally I did get a little sleep last night, I dreamt I was wandering all over the world to find it; I feel quite tired this morning.”

“Oh, is that all?” I said, much relieved.

“ALL!” said Mariannina, in a tone of disgust at my callousness; “quite enough to turn one’s stomach, I should say—all our beautiful money thrown away, *i nostri bei soldi!*”

I hurried into the *Sala* to recount to my husband this touching picture of a funeral wake over the loss of three francs and a half.

“Why does she not go and look for the turkey?” was the only answer I obtained.

“Good gracious me! do not be so practical, we are not in England.”

“No, I am quite aware of that,” he replied, somewhat pointedly, as he picked up his hat and strode off down the hill in pursuit of the turkey.

VI

ITALIAN FOOD—SOME RECIPES

*Padella forata,
E donna irritata,
Gran danno in casa.*

NEARLY every Italian is a born cook, so that, if the chef decamps in a rage, the Italian mistress need not necessarily wring her hands. Is not Pasquale, her major-domo, famous for his omelettes and stuffed pigeons, and Ettore, the gardener, known in all the country-side for his *risotto al sugo*, whenever, poor fellow, he has the pence to spend on such a dish; and then there is the wife of Angelo, the night-guard—well, she could as easily cook a dinner fit for the king as say her prayers to the Madonna. If the mistress deserted by her cook be of the *bourgeoisie* she will not even trouble to sigh at her loss, for since childhood she has learnt the great art, and is even independent of a cookery book; the daintiest dishes at every gala feast which she and her husband have given will always have been of her own making, and every detail of the marketing is in her capable hands.

But if in Italy it be easy to find a woman cook above the average for some sixteen pounds a year, and a really good man cook for about two pounds

a month, while in England you cannot get the same class of servant at double the price, I must in fairness say that the Italian has in many ways an easier task.

The Italian kitchen has two chief characteristics : an open wood fire-place with a big hooded chimney-piece and a charcoal range. Besides these you may sometimes see a large wooden cage in which the Christmas capon is fattening or a cock is waiting its turn to be made into soup, and in the meanwhile wakes up the family at an early hour with shrill notes.

The charcoal range may be described as a long and solid dresser built of bricks against the wall, on the top of which are several grates of about ten inches square, into which a handful of charcoal is dropped and lighted from underneath, where there is a small space for the draught and ashes. Between these grates, or *fornelli*, are brightly coloured glazed tiles, which are easily kept clean by a damp cloth. One disadvantage of the charcoal range is the dust, but I do not know that it is any worse than an English range ; of course it does not give the wonderful supply of hot water as in England, but, then, Italians have not our passion for incessant baths, and their first care is economy. Although we are by way of being extravagant in the matter of kitchen fires, my Italian range costs eight shillings a month as against nearly a ton of coal in England. In an ordinary household a cauldron of water is boiled up whenever it may be wanted, and after the mid-day meal, which is generally the principal one,





all the fires are let out, and for the evening *cena* only perhaps one *fornello* will be lighted. It is quite amusing to watch the cook upon her culinary preparations, setting all her little *fornelli* alight. And, indeed, it requires quickness and intelligence to order her fires aright: on one the kid soup begins to boil madly and has to be skimmed; next to it the meat for the *risotto* has to be turned in its butter and onion sauce; then the charcoal sinks and the big *marmite* with the vegetables half tumbles over; with a "*O Gesù Maria*" it is set up on its base again. Not one dull moment has the cook, or the onlooker for the matter of that; if her dishes give her a moment's repose, there is the fire to renew, and its flame must be quickened with the little straw fan; or sometimes the meat cooks too quickly and the fire must be covered over with a thin layer of ashes. I believe you are saying that you prefer the dull, scorching and rapacious English range, but that is only because you have not the Italian's love for taking plenty of time over a task and cooking things slowly.

An ordinary oven with a door, only heated above by charcoal, is often used; but more general is the "country oven," or *forno di campagna*, which is a circular tin stand with a cover, looking like a Chinese hat; and, set above one of the *fornelli*, it gets as hot as one wants for a small roast, a *soufflé*, pastry patties or rolls. Neither of these ovens do for the baking of the immense quantity of home-made bread made in many well-to-do, and in all artisan families.

For this most important item a brick oven is used, as in an old-fashioned English house; the bread is put in directly the ashes of the brushwood have been swept out. We are not possessed of this luxury and are obliged to send our bread to the town baker. Mariannina, who is very proud of her skill, and has good cause to be, soon appropriated my best plaid shawl for its early journey. I often watch her from the window striding quickly down the hill, an immense wooden tray on her head and the precious loaves snugly reposing beneath a Gordon tartan.

I say with pride that I can fling open the kitchen door at any moment of the day and it is always neat and clean. Indeed, I have in this very perfection found a disadvantage, for once, while trying to concoct a new dish before passing on my hard-earned knowledge to Mariannina, she whisked the flour bin, the salt, the wooden spoons, and every other utensil off the table directly I had turned my back, and long before I had ended my toils. But were it not for this cleanliness, it would not be possible to keep chickens in the kitchen.

Although every kitchen is amply furnished with copper pots and pans, earthenware *casseroles* or *marmites* are enormously used, and, of course, are much easier to keep clean than our English iron pots, which Mariannina always declares, with much disdain, look like the utensils of the devil's wife. I have always found that soup or a stew cooked in a *casserole* is better flavoured. Added to this every

Italian household, even of the artisan and the peasant, will have a good provision of *funghi*, which they have dried themselves and keep in a big bag near the fire-place; there will also be good tomato sauce bottled in the house, and a tomato preserve much stronger in flavour, which has been dried in the sun and becomes like a cake, and jars of small onions and peppers preserved in vinegar, and perhaps even earthenware jars as big as those of the forty thieves, full of whole tomatoes preserved in salt. The absence of these things in England, and the very stale and nasty Parmesan cheese, which one gets even from the best Italian warehouse in London, always depresses Mariannina. She gazes with a tragic air at the tomatoes provided for her sauces, and her eyes open wide at the thought of paying fourpence or sixpence a pound instead of a half-penny.

Another thing which fills her with dismay is the English joint. "What animal is this?" she asked, holding up a leg of Kentish mutton and turning it round and round with an expression of dismay. "It is the leg of a bear, not of a sheep." But, when she tasted the roast, she then understood why we had once asked for mutton in Brunella, which at the time had seemed inconceivable. No Italian will eat mutton; if our butcher here has any to dispose of, he calls it veal, and in this way is able to dispose of it on the occasion of a fair or carnival feast, when people are too excited to notice the difference. Italian mutton tastes very strong—the

Lucca kind is better—and suggests goat flesh. Veal, kid, lamb and chickens are what Italians rely on: lamb one gets all through the winter; and even more plentiful and excellent are the small young chickens, which have more of a game flavour than our big English fowls. Everything is killed very young here because of the scarcity of pasture. The Italian housewife with a small family is therefore spared the nightmare of the interminable joint and the spectacle of a mound of cold meat to be dealt with. Compare Mrs Beaton with an Italian cookery book: she is obliged to give endless recipes for “cold meat cookery,” while in an excellent work by Signor Pellegrino Artusi every dish is to be made from fresh material; and, indeed, after a family of three or four persons have taken even small portions of an Italian leg of lamb, for instance, there would be nothing left to warm up again, *Grazie a Dio*.¹

I give the palm to Mrs Beaton for brevity and keeping to the point. Signor Artusi seems to aim at entertaining his readers as well as instructing them. In the midst of his directions for the cooking of *maccheroni al pangrattato* he is reminded of something which was said while he ate this dish at the Tre Re at Bologna, and met “that sympathetic youth” Felice Orsini, the patriot of '48, and the anecdote leads on to a political allusion to Napoleon

¹ *La Scienza in Cucina e l'arte di mangiare bene* con 774 ricette. Tipografia Sandi, Firenze. Sold also at R. Bemporad, Via del Proconsolo 7, Florence.

III. "And now," says our genial author, "let us return to our *maccheroni*." Another dish recalls an acute attack of indigestion, of which he tells us in a manner too vividly Italian for my English pages; or in describing how to make a frog soup—a useful penitential dish for English Catholics—he enters into an interesting and absorbing study of biology. Knowing my author's peculiarities, I have not been astonished to find Mariannina seated at the table, the book propped up in front, with her head supported upon her hands and a look of infinite bewilderment in her patient eyes. When she first came to us she naturally only knew how to cook the dishes of the artisan and lower middle class; they are so good that we have kept to them; but as variety is not one of the advantages of the *Cucina borghese*, other additions have been necessary. She has the gift, in common with most of her countrymen, of being able to concoct a savoury dish, and her quickness in adding to her répertoire has been all the more remarkable, since her instructress has great difficulty in keeping up a fictitious character as "cook." The gods bless Mrs Beaton! "Now let us return to our *maccheroni*."

As I am often asked for the recipes of some of the native dishes, while Mariannina has stirred her *marmites*, I have stood by and learnt wisdom and much economy, which I now generously pass on. But if you try these dishes in England and do not find them good, please do not blame me or the Italians, but rather your own Parmesan cheese,

tomato sauce, oil and vinegar, and the absence of *funghi* and earthenware pots.

MINESTRONE, or BEAN POTTAGE.—This is the chief—one may call it the national—dish of the artisan and the peasant, and excellent it is, if only you can digest it. This is exactly how to make it :—Put a pound of white haricot beans, soaked in cold water all the previous night, into an earthenware pot, and cook with enough water to cover them well (add a little later if necessary), and once they have come to the boil cook them gently for some three hours. If made in a hurry it is not good. While this is going on, the *soffritto* is prepared : take half an onion, a small piece of garlic—or not as you like—half a teaspoonful of parsley, a piece of celery, a sausage or some Mortadella Bologna sausage (bacon or ham does as well), and some dried *funghi*, and chop these all up and fry in a small quantity of good oil or butter until the onion is cooked and nicely browned. When the beans are cooked pass them through an enamel sieve with fairly big holes, and put back the puré into the water in which the beans have boiled, together with the *soffritto* and the oil, and three spoonfuls of tomato sauce, two or three sliced potatoes, and some chopped-up cabbage or broccoli. Half an hour before dinner gradually drop in enough rice (well picked over) to make the soup into the consistency of a sort of pottage. It can also be made much thinner and more like an ordinary soup.

PAN' COTTO.—This is a very frequent dish,

made by the careful Italian housewife in order to use up her stale bread. Every morsel of bread is always put away in a drawer or a large earthenware jar ; some is made into *pan' cotto*, some is fried for soup and some grated for stuffings. The recipe is simple :—Chop up a bit of celery, some parsley, and a few *funghi*, and fry in butter. When the onion is browned and the vegetables cooked add two or three ripe tomatoes or two spoonfuls of tomato sauce and some veal-soup or water, and then throw in the bread, cut into slices, adding a little cold soup or water, and boil for some ten minutes. When taken off the fire and it is cool, a beaten egg and some grated Parmesan cheese are mixed into what looks rather like a child's pap.

ZUPPA VERDE is a good and favourite soup. Boil some spinach and beet leaves, and, when cooked, chop them up fine ; then prepare the *soffritto* of carrot, celery, onion, and parsley, and fry in some butter, and, when done, add flavouring of tomato sauce and the chopped-up vegetable, and pour in the veal-broth ; if a fast day, it will be made with water, which I do not recommend. Just before sending it to table, an egg or two and some grated Parmesan cheese are beaten up in it, and fried bread is served with it. This comes much more as a soup than the others, and is very good.

MACCHERONI.—Ways of cooking this national dish are to be found in every cookery book, so I will only give the manner which is most characteristic. *Maccheroni* is a meal here, not a savoury as with

us. I must again caution my reader that Italian *maccheroni* fresh each day from the factory is a very different thing to that which is bought in England. I shall never forget the consternation of Mariannina when she tried to give us a dish of it in our Kentish home : after boiling it for nearly an hour she came to say, with a kind of resigned despair, that "this English stuff would not cook, and that the devil had evidently put his horns into the pot just to spite her —*per dispetto*." I remarked, that such being the case the *maccheroni* ought to boil all the faster, but the look she gave me made me realise it was not a matter to joke about. When fresh, even the larger sort takes about a quarter of an hour to cook ; and of course it ought never to be previously soaked, as I have read in some books. This is how one sets to work :—First of all there is the sauce to be made —*il sugo*—for which take a pound of lean veal, including the weight of the bone, one ounce of butter, half an onion (or less if it is a very big one), a small carrot, two pieces of celery cut up, and a little less than two ounces of sausage chopped up fine. The piece of meat is put whole into the *casserole* with these ingredients and salt and pepper, and turned continually. When browned, three large spoonfuls of tomato preserve are poured over the meat and a little flour sprinkled, and then some hot water added from time to time, while it gently stews. When cooked, the veal is put to one side to keep hot and the sauce left on the fire for a few minutes with some dried *funghi*, which have been previously

softened in hot water. Mariannina always uses the water from the *funghi* to pour over the piece of meat while it is cooking ; but then, her thrift might pass into a proverb.

A quarter of an hour before the mid-day meal the half pound of *maccheroni* is dropped into absolutely boiling salted water, where a cabbage is also cooking, the quality and freshness of the *maccheroni* deciding the exact time needed ; it is then well drained, and, with the cut-up cabbage, put into a large deep dish and mixed well in with the sauce, to which are added four large spoonfuls of grated Parmesan cheese and a little butter. This is called *condire la minestra*, and is looked upon as an important ceremony which the good housewife does not entrust to the maid-of-all-work, but will leave the table and hurry to the kitchen to do herself.

The piece of veal, called the *companatico*, is served separately in the midst of a little wall of potatoes or of vegetables. Thus at a very little cost two excellent dishes can be made up out of one pound of meat and half a pound of *maccheroni*.

The *condimento* of the *maccheroni* is varied : sometimes it is only butter, cheese and a few sliced anchovies, or else a happy mixture of peas and potatoes are added to the butter and cheese. The more luxurious way—with Bechamel sauce—is only used by the rich.

When Mariannina has sent us in a particularly nice and generous dish of *maccheroni* garnished with a few pieces of meat, she does not always serve

the *companatico*, but keeps it for the evening meal, and boasts of her economy. "There," she says, "had I sent it in you would have eaten it; and now, did you feel hungry after the *maccheroni*—it is impossible? But what is the good of my economising when you spend the economies on flowers, which are no good to anyone."

RISOTTO is one of the best of Italian dishes, but difficult to get in England, as so few cooks know how to cook rice properly. I do not pretend to know anything about the matter, except that English rice is often like a poultice, and that Mariannina opened her eyes when I told her we were carefully informed by our cookery books "to wash the rice well in several changes of water."

"How dirty your rice must be," was her polite remark.

These are her directions for the boiling of rice:—First of all do not wash the rice, but pick it over very carefully and gradually drop it into *an abundance* of really boiling water. When cooked (the Milanese like it what I should call uncooked) drain it well, sprinkle with salt, and either put into a covered saucepan by the fire to dry, or in a cullender in a moderate oven.

Now for the cooking of *risotto all' artigiana*, which I do not think can be beaten by any other *risotto* recipe:—First of all obtain a sauce just as if you were to make the *maccheroni* dish I have given, the only difference being that the meat is cut up into small pieces, and the rice is put in directly the sauce

is made and cooked in it together with the meat. An extra supply of veal or chicken broth must be at hand to add gradually, as the rice absorbs the gravy very quickly. Directly the rice is cooked and *risotto* has become the right consistency, neither sloppy nor too much of a cake, it is put into a deep dish and mixed with grated Parmesan cheese, and a small piece of butter is put on the top. One pound of meat will make a *risotto* for about five people ; but, adds Mariannina, it depends entirely on their appetites, and it would be well to give them a first dish of *antipasto*, some anchovies or raw ham, with fresh figs or some Bologna sausage, in order to stifle the first pangs of hunger. The quantity of rice she calculates at a big spoonful a head. It will be seen that *risotto* is not a dish for every day, as two things are not made out of one, as in the case of our *maccheroni*, and an extra two cups or so of good broth is used as well. If there is no broth ready, *maggi* is often used, but fresh soup is, of course, preferable.

POLENTA, when made with a well-flavoured sauce, is an excellent dish. Drop gradually into a pint of boiling salted water about one pound of finely ground Indian corn—*farina gialla*—until it is about the consistency of porridge, and then boil it for about a quarter of an hour, stirring all the time with a wooden spoon. Then pour it out on to a wooden slab to the thickness of an inch, and leave it to cool and stiffen. Then prepare the usual *soffritto* of onion, parsley, *funghi*, a sausage and some *mortadella* (bacon would do as well), and fry it all together with

oil, and when it has browned add the usual tomato sauce and a cup of broth. The *polenta* will now be firm enough to cut into narrow strips or squares with a string and placed in a fireproof dish in alternate layers with the grated Parmesan cheese. It is much improved if the dish is placed for a few minutes on the fire before sending to table.

TORTELLI make the festal dish among my friends in Brunella : the guests at a fair, marriage or carnival luncheon feel a positive glow of satisfaction when they appear, not only because they are exceedingly good, but because of the honour symbolised ;—they are like the bottled wine. The first time that Mariannina did us the honour of making *tortelli* an air of mystery hung over the castle. It was Christmas Eve, and we knew we were to have a treat. We also knew that both the servants had risen at dawn, if not before, and coming into the *Sala* we saw the oak chests and the sofa covered with white cloths, and were told that upon no pretext whatsoever were we to look beneath, for those little bumpy things sticking up were the great secret to be divulged at mid-day. I must add that this was before we had weaned them from regarding the *Sala* as an adjunct of the kitchen.

Why *tortelli* are supposed to be a great work I never can discover, as the recipe is simple enough : a piece of lean veal is stewed in the usual way with its *soffritto*, either one pound or two, according to the number of guests expected, and when cooked it is well pounded up and then made into a

sort of paste with grated bread and beaten eggs and a little cheese. The next operation is to make the envelopes for the stuffing. About two pounds of flour, two eggs, and salt is all worked into a stiff paste with some water; this is called *pasta fatta in casa* (home-made *maccheroni*), and it is marvellous to see the clever way it is rolled out into an immense smooth surface about the thickness of cardboard, and either folded over and over and quickly cut into fine strips to be boiled and then served with a sauce, or else prepared for *tortelli*. Circles of about two inches in diameter are cut, the meat stuffing laid on each circle, which is folded over and pressed down at the edge. These are either boiled in the soup and eaten thus, or boiled in salted water and served up in a good, well-flavoured sauce.

FISH is only eaten by the well-to-do burgher, and then not frequently, as it is, comparatively speaking, dear. Instead, they make great use of a terrible dried fish called *baccalà*, which has to be soaked for days, and fills the house with its smell. But dried haddock cooked like *baccalà* is excellent. Cut the haddock in small pieces and put them in a covered *casserole* with a little good oil, and between each layer stew some pepper, a little tomato sauce, and some chopped-up onion and parsley. Then cover with water and put it in the oven for about an hour, until the liquid is absorbed.

But although an artisan may seldom buy fresh fish for himself, he knows what is good and how the different qualities ought to be cooked. When the

son of our friend Ulisse is to get fish for us at the seaport where he works, he flies a handkerchief from the window of the train, if he has been successful in his quest, and Feruccio bounds down the hill to fetch it. If the fish is anything which Mariannina is not likely to know, it is accompanied by a little note with careful directions for its cooking, and in this way we have been indebted for a delicacy unknown to the Ritz! In the winter and spring a good many *gamberi marini* are caught, which, according to the dictionary, are called cray-fish, and look like very big prawns, six inches long; as they cost about fourpence apiece, it is somewhat of a luxury, though, of course, in England they would be much dearer. They are usually boiled. The novelty consisted in frying them in oil, the delicate flavour of the fish being preserved; and in this way even the thin crisp shell is eaten. A friend of ours laughingly described it as a new sensation in food, and was amused that after having been all round the world he should find a novelty in Brunella.

MEAT.—Frying is a very favourite way of serving either veal or lamb cutlets, and a common dish is what is called a *fritto misto*, consisting of a little bit of everything—fried cauliflower, carrots, potatoes, brain, sweetbread, rissoles, pieces of veal, and tiny lamb chops. Frying in Italy is a much more successful operation than in England: a generous quantity of oil is used, so that the fish, meat, vegetable, or sweet may be well covered over and there be no need to add any oil, which would spoil the fry. What

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remains of the oil is carefully put away and set aside for the next occasion, a little fresh being added each time ; of course the oil used to fry fish would not be used for anything else. The cost of good cooking oil varies according to the harvest, but it is usually about one shilling and threepence a litre, which corresponds to a fraction over two pints. It is always a big item of expense, but lard is even dearer, and butter, which costs about one shilling and fivepence a pound, does not go so far and does not fry so well.

A festive dish is *Pollo* or else *Lepre alla cacciatore*, for either young chickens or a young hare can be equally well done "according to the huntsman." Dante, our village sportsman, and in private life a tinman, presented us with a hare, and insisted upon dressing and cooking it "in French fashion" and carrying it in to table himself, which he did in full sporting attire. The "French way" turned out to be the ordinary Italian method, and Mariannina was very indignant at his presuming to teach her what she had known "since she was weaned." It consists in cutting the chicken or hare into joints, browning it in a little butter and oil, with a sprinkling of flour, salt and pepper, until it becomes the colour of a nut. Half a pint of red wine, in which two fresh tomatoes have been mixed, is poured over the meat, the frying-pan is then covered over and placed on a very steady bright fire, and when the wine has been absorbed, it is ready for table. It is rather a rich dish ; but then Italians, although they

talk a great deal about their stomachs, seem to be able to eat anything, even to chicken and lamb bones, which they scrunch up as if they were so many toothpicks. I suppose it is for this reason that the Brunellese had never heard of making soup out of chicken bones. I for once was able to teach Mariannina an economy when I told her to set our chicken bones on the fire (as yet we have not adopted the custom of the Italians, and, indeed, one would require their magnificent teeth), and I saw a look in her eyes as if she thought me quite mad; but as it was a harmless and inexpensive freak, well—*pazienza*. Next morning she came to me with a very different expression.

“*Padrona mia*,” she said, “there has been a positive miracle—the water from those chicken bones has turned into a jelly; one could stand on it. I begin to think the English people are more intelligent than we are.”

“Oh! Mariannina,” I exclaimed, overcome with modesty.

“*Ma sì*; and another reason has struck me—the habit you have of hanging meat. Here we eat it as hard as a leather boot.”

On such things does our fame rest in Brunella.

VEGETABLES are plentiful, and, compared to the English market, very cheap: artichokes at a half-penny each, first peas at fivepence a pound, and asparagus sevenpence for a good-sized bundle. In cooking them the great characteristic seems to be to disguise their natural taste, but this fault, if toned

down, can become a virtue, and one escapes from the overcooked vegetable-marrow served up on soppy toast. I must in honesty confess that in England vegetables are far better in quality and in greater variety. Italians do not seem to have much critical faculty in the region of horticulture, but they make the best use of what they have. While with us the "greens" are handed over to the kitchen-maid, in Italy they are cooked with great care and served up as a separate dish after the meat. Of course artisans who cannot afford separate dishes of vegetables every day depend mainly on salads—chicory and wild dandelion, which they gather on the roadside.

Stuffed onions, tomatoes, cabbage leaves, young pumpkins, peppers and egg plants are favourite and excellent dishes, and are all made in much the same way. For the stuffing mix a *soffritto* of butter, parsley, garlic (if liked!), a very little flavouring of tomato sauce, pepper and salt in the *casserole*, then add some cooked meat chopped up fine, and when taken off the fire, some beaten eggs, grated bread and Parmesan cheese. The vegetables are stuffed and cooked in the oven, standing in about an inch of broth so as not to burn them. Cabbage leaves are tied round with cotton (which remove before serving) and look like miniature cabbages.

Vegetable marrow pie or pumpkin pie is another excellent dish. The vegetable, cut into slices, is fried with some onion in a little butter and salt, and when taken off the fire mixed with some well-

beaten eggs and a little grated Parmesan cheese. Mariannina recommends adding a little milk to the mixture, she says it makes it more *gentile*. It is then put into a buttered tin strewn with bread crumbs and baked.

Potato pie is also good, made of boiled potatoes and then mashed and mixed with butter, grated Parmesan, bread crumbs and well-beaten eggs, and baked in the oven.

Spinach pudding is often made, and is an excellent way of cooking the Italian variety, which is much more bitter than ours. It is first boiled, well drained, chopped up fine, and mixed with grated bread crumbs and Parmesan, a little butter, and slight flavouring of tomato sauce, and the usual beaten eggs. The mixture is put in a mould and steamed *à bain marie*. Peas are cooked in the same way.

Cardoons, too, are excellent, but require a surprising amount of boiling. Mariannina has a very good and simple way of cooking them—cut in small pieces after boiling, and warmed up in a little butter in a *casserole*, Parmesan cheese sprinkled over and some eggs (according to number of people), broken in whole and poached. We always have this served in the hot *casserole*.

A very good way of using artichokes is in a sort of omelette, but of course they must be young and tender, and is therefore a difficult dish to have in England. In Italy each plant, if properly cultivated, bears fifty artichokes, so it does not seem a crime to

cut them young. Cut the artichokes (previously boiled) lengthway into two or four pieces, fry gently in butter, and pour over them some well-beaten eggs, and shake the dish till the eggs set. An enamel dish can be used, but I always fancy the earthenware *casserole*.

In the same way pumpkins are cut very young, when only two and three inches long, and sliced, dipped in flour, and fried in oil.

Cabbage is a great deal eaten, cut up fine and heated up with a little butter and flavouring of vinegar. Mariannina often cooks it in this way:—boiled, then cut up and mixed with a plain white sauce and put in a dish with layers of bread-crumbs and grated Parmesan (an extra quantity sprinkled on top), and baked in the oven until it takes a nice colour.

An excellent and simple winter dish can be made of haricot beans. We call it *fagioli alla Mariannina*. Take about a quarter of a pound of beans which have been soaked for twelve hours and boil them till quite tender; mix a sauce gradually over the fire of one table-spoonful of butter, the same of flour, and salt and pepper—when mixed add some milk, stirring all the time. Then put in the beans and, if necessary, some more milk. When all is of a proper consistency, take off the fire, and, after it has cooled, add two yolks of eggs previously beaten, put into a buttered mould and bake in the oven until it rises like a *soufflé*. A *puré* of these same beans flavoured with a little vinegar and

heated up with butter and salt and pepper also makes an excellent dish.

SWEETS.—At an ordinary family meal puddings are seldom eaten, but when guests are expected every effort is made to serve an elegant sweet. The great point is that it should be showy and have taken a long time to make. Having invited some Italian people to lunch, I suggested an English apple-tart, but at this Mariannina nearly wept. “It would not make any *figura*,” she said; and above all things she wished to impress our guests. So she insisted upon what is called a *Buddino Nero* (black pudding), and in the choice I saw her wisdom: for while being a pretty dish it was economical, as both the whites and the yolks of the eggs were used.

Take just under six ounces of sweet almonds, and after skinning and drying them well—in the sun, says Mariannina, but the fire ought to do—chop them up very fine and put them in the *casserole* with the same quantity of melted sugar (powdered). When the mixture has taken a golden colour, pound it well in the mortar and mix with six whites of eggs beaten to a froth, put into a buttered mould and cook *à bain marie*.

Serve cold with the following sauce, called a *Zabbaione*, for which is needed the six yolks of eggs left over, two ounces of powdered sugar and half a pint of Marsala, some adding two spoonfuls of cognac or rum. First of all beat the yolks and sugar well together till they look almost white, then add the

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wine and put it on to a quick, bright fire, stirring vigorously all the time. Directly it is on the point of boiling take it off; if it boils, says Mariannina, your *Zabbaione* will be a mad one. This is also served alone in little cups and is a favourite sweet. It is also looked upon as the panacea of all ills, an invalid always being offered a *Zabbaione*. They have great faith in Marsala: when a poor man is dying there will always be some charitable person ready to send him a bottle.

Boiled custard with sponge cakes and whipped white of egg floating on the top is much used on less festive occasions, and is called *Zuppa Inglese*, whereas in England we know it as Italian Cream.

Here we use sweet chestnut flour a great deal made into fritters and fried in oil, and, if made thin enough, they are very good, and in the same way so are rice fritters. A great use is made for luncheon parties of those gaudy-looking cakes tasting of everything under the sun which decorate the window of every confectioner. In the afternoon little pastry cakes are offered with coffee or *vermouths*; for Italians cannot bear that you should not "break bread in their house." I have been astonished to see a cavalry officer returning from a hot ride eating cream tartlets and drinking *vermouth* at ten in the morning at one of the innumerable *pasticerie* to be found in every Italian town.

I have not always thought it necessary to give the exact proportions for some of these recipes; any-

one without being an expert cook would be able to judge the amount of eggs and flavouring according to the number and the taste of the family.

And now that I have ended my cookery notes, you will think that I have followed in the footsteps of Signor Artusi, but if ever you read his book (and you could not do better) you will see that really I have stuck to my point as closely as a snail to a wall.

VII

OUR GUARDIANS

Chi non ruba, non ha roba

DURING those first days when we were wondering how the Brunellese were going to treat us and they paid not the faintest attention to us, we thankfully submitted to be run by faithful and honest Paolo. Decorated with medals and laden with diplomas after twenty years' service as a *maresciallo* of Carabineers, he is now at the head of the local co-operative railway stores, keeps the Fortress keys, and farms, in his own peculiar way, the Fortress lands. From the first he loomed out upon us as a person of importance. "Sor Paolo has said so" becomes a verdict in the town, and a scolding issued in his big resonant voice sends the Brunellese boys scampering off in terror, a power we seek in vain to acquire.

Paolo met us the dark night we arrived from Bergamo, but, as we stepped out of an unexpected third-class carriage, and he was dressed in *frack* with a large black wide-awake hat, we failed at first to recognise each other. He has since discovered in us kindred spirits, and we are never likely to see that *frack* coat again, but shall become familiar with a certain frayed cap, yellow

shirt and *raison*-coloured suit of well-worn clothes. He says that as for so many years he had to be smart and clean, he now means to be happy, and certainly he succeeds.

Paolo did everything for us those first weeks, from the planting of a cypress tree to the buying of a kilo of *maccheroni*—by which I mean he saw that it was properly done. “He has a great eye,” as they say in Italy, and he has always used that eye for our advantage. His connection with the castle is through his wife, the Signora Fausta, the daughter of one of the former owners.

The story, untainted by legend, of the “Consul’s” purchase of the ruin is this. After scrambling over rocks and scaling walls, and performing other mad feats only connected with English people interested in *l’antichità*, he was just driving away when a man hailed him. “Why don’t you buy it—you English like that kind of thing,” said Antonio, the inn-keeper, pointing at the castle, which, even roofless, looked down on Brunella like an undaunted lion. The “Consul” was somewhat taken aback; but when a possible price of ten pounds was suggested, he handed Signor Antonio his card and told him to see to the matter. A year passed, and the “Consul” returned with a party of friends; upon entering their carriage again the same inn-keeper appeared, and the “Consul” chaffed him for false promises. Antonio opened his eyes. “But, *Signore*, I have been working hard and patiently for you, and only a year has passed; why, that is

nothing." And, indeed, when a sixteenth century castle is in question it seems like a mere whiff from the west wind. Where the arduous work came in on the part of Antonio no one has ever discovered, as he was one of the three owners; but the facts remain that the price rose to thirty-nine pounds, the contract of purchase was duly sealed within a week of this conversation, and it will be seen that the three men cleared a profit.

When the railway came the Brunellese began to feel important; and while they thought it time to talk about "*la nostra Fortezza*," the Signora Fausta recalled the prosperous days at the Albergo Italia before her brother ruined them all and broke his father's heart. Looking back, the vision has become more rose-coloured, not to say gilded, and now the good lady, not as Paolo's wife but as daughter of the late owner of the fortress, holds up her head in the town and smiles with good-natured condescension upon her friends. When I see her in the shop, while Paolo pays a hasty visit to his fields to watch the growth of a favourite onion, I am impressed by the dignified manner in which she ministers to the railway clients. They must feel that a grandee in disguise has strayed into the Stores. The Signora Fausta has also taken us beneath the shelter of her wing, and endless is her kindness towards us. She has not forgotten the cunning of her hand since the days when she used to help her father's cook in the *Albergo*; and when we are away in the summer she makes

tomato preserve for us, while Paolo undertakes the herculean task of rubbing it through the sieve. I do not think she ever makes a festive sweet for themselves without sending us up a portion in an elegant little parcel, and sometimes we are given an open tart or a chocolate pudding all to ourselves. When we think that Paolo has fifty-seven pounds a year, including his pension, on which to keep wife, child and mother-in-law, these presents nearly choke us.

Signora Fausta has a superb use of the Italian language. "*Ho fatto la sua ambasciata*" is her manner of informing me that she has done my humble commission in the village. Her epistolary style, too, always astonishes me ; how did she learn to write such excellent Italian, with such a choice of words, in a village school nearly forty years ago ? When she lends her hand to documentary composition her style soars towards the sublime. Paolo had asked me to use my influence to get him the right to sell salt and tobacco in the village, a lucrative privilege given by the Government to the poorest and most deserving in the commune. I asked Signora Fausta to write down for my guidance a few details of Paolo's career ; when half way through the document she brought me, I realised that it was I who was addressing "the honourable gentleman, Minister of Finance," in these words : "I find myself with my family in Brunella, in the province of Massa Carrara, living in one of those towered castles once among the feudal possessions

of Maroello Malaspina, the host of Dante Alighieri, a place surrounded by luxuriant vegetation and adorned with every beauty. Here it is given me to raise up my soul, here to live peacefully enough, and following the dictates of my heart to accomplish a little good for suffering humanity thus. I have taken under my protection a certain Paolo . . . custodian of the castle we inhabit. He is an *ex-maresciallo* of Royal Carabineers, father of a family, a good fellow—*una buona pasta d'uomo*, very honest and laborious."

Here followed a graphic picture of a burdened father in failing health; and as I tried to picture burly and jovial Paolo under my protection, I felt that Signora Fausta possessed indeed the impassioned pen of a romantic writer.

With the rest of Brunella I am ready to pander to her harmless desire for social dignity. When she favours me with an afternoon call, I place her with a bow at my right hand on the sofa, and order a cup of coffee, which she sips with careless grace. Her hands folded below her waist, and with many an ejaculation to Bacchus, she entertains me delightfully with an account of everyone in the town, their ambitions, their love affairs, their naughtiness and Municipal jealousies; while occasionally she breaks into a reminiscence of castle days "*nei tempi del mio povero Papà*." The tone in which she mentions her "poor Papa" she might have learnt from Mrs Micawber herself. She makes me feel a positive usurper, and

I cannot help asking if the roof was sounder in those days.

"*Perbacco*, we never found a roof necessary at all! In the time of my poor Papa we lived at Brunella—in that palace in the square of Garibaldi "; here she waved towards a low-roofed house in sight of our windows ; "and my Papa kept the castle as his hobby. He grew corn on the ramparts and a few garlies and vines in the garden."

Our gardening activities have now done away with the harvest on the ramparts, and our gazelle eats up the grass in the moat, facts which might well ruffle the temper of anyone less serenely good-natured than Paolo. He views each new encroachment with a smile.

Like many tradesmen in the town, he lives half in his shop and half in the fields, and, in order to give a full measure of time to each occupation, he rises at dawn. As at the age of nineteen he spent six months with a market-gardener near his native town of Como, he has become accustomed to regard himself as an authority on agriculture in general, and many are the dissertations with which he favours his friends. Failure is attributed to bad luck, destiny, to anything, in short, except a haphazard treatment of the soil. The harvest he reaps is one of immense delight.

Set like an oasis among the castle rocks are a few productive terraces called the *Favale* because of the big beans which are always grown there. Whenever Paolo can spare a minute from the shop,

or Signora Fausta can be induced to leave her household duties and take her seat behind the counter among the Parmesan cheeses and demijons of wine, he hurries away to the *Favale*. His thoughts are always there: during the mid-day at home he is for ever darting to the window to cast an eye over the cherished fields, which he can see across the low roofs. And sometimes Brunella is shaken by the sound of his stentorian tones, as, hanging out of the window, he hurls every malediction known to the Southerner at a peasant boy rapidly stuffing a bag full of his hay, or a woman stealthily creeping up the hill to gather faggots in the ilex wood. On spring and summer evenings, as we find him seated on a grassy bank, a flask of wine at hand, and a supper of tinned tunny, bread and garlic spread out on a stone at his knees, he looks the personification of jovial contentment. A favourite hen struts round him, rabbits run up to sniff at the inviting meal, and friends from the station over the way stroll in to join the family circle. On these occasions Paolo puts on the air of a buffoon, and gives vent to a solid kind of fun which, owing to his humorous face and the applause of his wife, draws laughter from us all. An Italian's conversation is sometimes not unlike the advertisements of patent medicines in a modern newspaper. "*Con rispetto parlando*—saving your presence," he says, and then he is free of the road, and you know what to expect. When the mood takes Paolo to drop his jests, I have

learnt to assume a blank expression at the danger signal and contrive a sudden lapse of memory of the Italian language. Not so the Signora Fausta : she rocks herself to and fro, laughing heartily. " Really, Paolo," she exclaims, " you are as lively this evening as the new wine in the vats."

VIII

THE BUYING OF A MARBLE VASCA

*L'uomo è la stoppa, la donna è la fiamma; poi viene il diavolo
e soffia.*

AS our sleep at night is broken by the cracking of whips, the rumbling of great carts and the hoarse shouts of the drivers, when even the sheds in our station-yard are roofed in with shining slabs of marble, we thought, in our innocence, that a marble tank was to be had for the asking. And marble here is cheaper than cement. Carlino, a young carter, who brings marble by the ton, year in year out, to Brunella station, came up with a friend to take measurements and inspect the spot. The measurements were simple enough: four slabs two metres square for the sides, four for the bottom, and four narrow strips for the border. As it was Sunday, there were many friends to help—Paolo, the carpenters, and our peasant family, who were all greatly excited at the idea of this new improvement. “It is clear as daylight,” said young Carlino; “my master is delighted to serve you, and you shall have the marble in a few days.” “How convenient,” we exclaimed, “to live in a marble country.” The few days lengthened out into weeks, and then Carlino appeared, with a smiling face, to say that his

master had lost the measurements, and would we have patience to wait a few more days. After a month the marble arrived at the station. The news had been brought by Ulisse, who, in a diplomatic speech, prepared us for a disappointment. He seemed no less depressed than ourselves as we all three stood in the station-yard, counting out, instead of our twelve pieces, eighteen bits of marble of every variety of shape and thickness, while Carlino said in a comforting tone : *Sarà lo stesso*—it is all the same.

Being unable to procure marble at our door we went to Avenza armed with a letter of introduction from Ulisse to a marble worker called *Il Poverino*.

The mediæval town has fallen upon evil days, and the old castle, once stormed and captured by Castruccio Castracani, stands desolate in the midst of hovels, while a new town is growing up a mile away by the sea-shore. The *Marina d'Avenza* is the port of Carrara, and life gathered round the pier, where gaily painted coasting vessels were being laden. A host of rough-looking men, shouting and singing, hoisted up the marble, and, as the immense blocks hung suspended in the air, we had an uneasy feeling lest the chains should break and the frail-looking ships sink beneath their weight. Away from the clamour on the pier there was absolute peace, the silence only broken now and again by the distant call of a man selling pumpkin seeds. Once beyond the houses, which straggle down to the sea-shore, we forgot the mean habitations of man, and followed with delight the sweeping line of golden

UoR



A BLOCK OF MARBLE, WEIGHING ABOUT TWENTY TONS, ON ITS WAY TO ALENZA

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coast fringed with the pine forests of Viareggio and San Rossore. Inland the Apuan range rose up in a grand amphitheatre of marble peaks, magnificently shadowed in the morning light.

Only after mid-day is the stillness of Avenza again broken, when the big marble carts begin to lumber down along the rough road from Carrara. Unusual clamour is heard when a gigantic block comes, drawn by some thirty big-horned oxen.

We failed to find the vendor of marble until we happened to mention his nicknames, which the wise Ulisse had told us. He seemed to be equally well known as *Maria*, because of his love of serving at Mass as a youth, they told us, and also as the *Poverino*, a name we did not at first think very appropriate. At the edge of the sands, away from the village, and within sight of the calm sea, we found his house, bran new and pink, standing in a garden. As no answer came to our knocking we walked in to the kitchen, where we saw a tall, handsome woman of the Roman matron type making *maccheroni* for the mid-day meal. With sleeves tucked up and rolling-pin in hand her reception of us was most courteous and stately. When she discovered that we came from Brunella her excitement was so great that we feared a floury embrace. It turned out that everyone in the town was her near relation, either through her own family or that of her first husband. She beamed upon us, and we became such fast friends that soon she was confiding to me the wonderful bargain she had made

in beans, and asking me whether I bought my stock wholesale or not. What did I think of them, she asked, as she fished them up with a big wooden spoon out of the *marmite*. "A real chance to get such beans for twenty centimes a kilo, *non è vero Signora?*"

The husband came in ; he was a strong-looking man, with a fair and ruddy complexion and blue eyes which looked out at you in an honest but dreamy way. His manner was collected and gentle ; and when he promptly sat down at the kitchen table to draw out the plan of our tank and calculate cost, we congratulated ourselves at having at last found a business-like Italian. We went with him to a yard close by to select the particular kind we fancied. Standing in the midst of a mass of dazzling white and speckless marble of great value, we were much taken by a dark grey variety with purple veining, but finally chose some white slabs with grey veining, and a border to match, which were to be delivered at our door, and paid for with the same promptitude as he chose to observe in carrying out the order. They were to be three inches thick, rough on one side (what is called *crosta*) and polished on the other. In olden days the work of carving it out of the mountain and cutting it into slabs was all done by hand, miraculously it seems, but then there were no foreign buyers with their vision ahead of a short life, and now, although the northern Italian has also entered keenly into the race of life, and the marble merchant of the provinces of Tuscany and Modena

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has machinery to cut the Titanic blocks by means of electric wires, he still continues to measure time as it suits his temperament.

As my story concerning our tank goes off from this point somewhat at a tangent, I will mention that instead of the promised fortnight, "by the body of Bacchus," it was two months before it arrived; but this is a mere detail chronicled for the sake of truth. The great fact remains that the marble slabs, brought all the way from Avenza by a pair of dark grey oxen in an ancient Roman cart with scarlet-painted wheels, were safely carried up on to the ramparts amidst an admiring and sympathetic crowd. We deemed the final possession of the *Vasca* such a triumph that we have erected over it a trellis dome, surrounded by a pergola for Wicheriana roses, and Ferruccio, our peasant lad, has named it *Il Tempietto*.

We liked the man and his wife so much, Avenza, and the solitude of its great stretch of shore, that we begged of the *Poverino* and his wife to take us in as lodgers a little later in the year. At first they hesitated because of their food, but when we said that nothing pleased us better than bean soup, *maccheroni* and fish, they gladly consented to turn their reception-room into our bedroom. Before leaving they pressed us to buy a large marble statue of a goddess standing on the landing, but it was a proof of friendship we could not give. It reminded us of a life-sized plaster cast of a Venus, which adorned the staircase of the Hotel Byron at Ravenna,

and which we had witnessed being whitewashed by the hall-porter.

On our return I hastened into the kitchen to tell Mariannina of the plan to stay with our charming new friends that Spring before returning to England. I saw a twinkle in her eye. They knew you at Avenza, I told her, "and sent many greetings." "And I know all about them," was her answer. And while she stirred her sauces she unfolded the story of the *Poverino*.

"The *Poverino* married as quite a young man—he is now only about forty—a very beautiful woman whom he loved very much. They had three sons, and their business prospered. Yes, all things went well with them. But when they had been married some ten years, the neighbours began to whisper about a certain good-looking *maresciallo* of carabinieri who was then privately courting his wife. At last the gossip reached him. At first he paid no attention, but at last his suspicions were aroused. One morning he told his wife that he would be away on business all day, and, as he often had to go to Carrara or Brunella, she did not think anything about it. The *Poverino* pretended to go to the railway station, but instead wandered about the fields, always keeping Avenza in sight. Presently he met his youngest boy hurrying towards a hut in his field near the town. 'Where are you going to with that basket?' he asked; and then he lifted the napkin and saw a lot of provisions—slices of ham, sausage, veal and wine. The child was very frightened, but his father did not

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scold him, and only made him promise not to say a word to his mother that they had met. Then the *Poverino* went into the hut, climbed up into the loft and hid among the hay. Very soon he heard his wife's voice, and she came in followed by the carabineer, and both were very merry. He watched them at their feast, and still he waited. Then he became as a devil and shot the carabineer dead. His wife sprang to her feet like a wild beast. 'You have killed my beloved,' she cried, and cursed him. His only reply was to lift his gun again and shoot her through the heart. The lovers were laid on one bier and carried across the fields to be buried without a priest. No one mourned or pitied them. But everyone helped the *Poverino*, who took refuge in the woods near here. When the trial came on, he gave himself up; he had only escaped to avoid the long wait and see how things were likely to go. As it happened, I think he was only in prison a few days, and a year later he married the widow from Brunella."

At the end of the tale, which Mariannina had recounted with great calmness, I said that I thought the Signora Emilia had shown extraordinary courage in marrying him.

"Why?" asked Angiolina, her sister, who was standing by. "He is a good man; he did well to revenge his honour, and I admire him. I should be proud to feel that my Umberto would do the same."

Amazed at such a speech from the gentle and placid Angiolina, I remarked that in England we had

recourse to the law, when wives were unfaithful, and, if a man killed his rival, he ran the chance of being hanged.

"But our way is best," said both sisters together. "A man must protect his honour, and it is quicker so"—here they imitated firing a pistol—"the law takes too long. The *Poverino* is a brave man and an honest one, '*un galantuomo*,' and everyone said so at the time. The Signora Emilia is a lucky woman."

"Shall you be going next month to stay at Avenza?" asked Mariannina, in an even voice, but with laughing eyes.

IX

A DANCE

*E quando ballan co' sù innamorati,
Paion tanti serpi avvelenati;
E quando ballan co' sù favoriti,
Allor del mal di piedi son guariti."*

LAST November the old Fortezza awoke from a long and peaceful slumber, and this is how it happened.

Brunella owns two clubs, whose members give dances throughout the autumn and the carnival. The less important club is composed of peasants, marble carters and artisans. The well-to-do tradesmen, railway officials and local magnates monopolise the smart club, and no one is admitted to its festivities who comes without a collar, cravat and gloves. But Adelina told me that they have been known to make an exception to their rigid rules.

"For instance," she said, "my brother Carlino, who does not belong to the aristocracy of the town, and only wears a loose tie, has often been asked to take me to their dances, and Signor Flavio of the Swiss shop, or Signor Salone of the Commune, has offered to be my *cavaliere*. It is well to have one beforehand, for, if one is a wallflower, everybody laughs next day. Once that rough fellow Frederico tried to go in by force to play billiards,

and there was a real battle. The lamps were knocked over, so no one knew who was breaking people's heads. *Il Milanin* got a bad cut with a key; but who can bear witness in the dark? Poor Signor Maso of the Post Office, who hates a row, hid under a marble table when the scuffle began. There at least he thought himself safe; but no, crack went the marble top, and he only just escaped in time with a sound head."

The president of this exclusive club is Signor Nini the tailor, a dapper little man, who keeps a rebellious forelock in place with a lady's side-comb and always wears grey kid boots with pearl buttons. One day he sent up to tell us that some musician friends of his from a neighbouring town would like to come and play to us: they desired nothing in return, he declared, neither food nor money, their sole wish being to make our acquaintance, and it was further intimated that we should be foolish to refuse such an offer. The handmaidens were in a tremor of excitement. "What a chance for our *Padroni* to dance!" they exclaimed, and immediately let fall hints as to the friends they would like asked. They took it for granted that Assunta, the peasant woman who brings us our milk, and her sons, with one or two other peasant friends, should not come, and were amazed when I said that the *festa* would not be complete without them. In vain they urged how uncomfortable the poor lads would be in such company, and that, of course, they would never have the courage to dance.

When the great day arrived we started early in the morning for a mountain climb with Ulisse, leaving Mariannina and her sisters to prepare for the evening's festivity.

Each time Ulisse takes us an expedition we declare it to be the most perfect of all, and although we never wander out of our familiar valley, we seem to be exploring a new country. We crossed the river and climbed the highest of our hills, always gradually mounting through chestnut groves, which still showed grand forest trees. Boughs of golden leaves above us, a carpet of them beneath our feet, big chestnuts to eat on the way, glimpses of the valley far below us and of a shining river, great clouds rolling across a brilliant blue sky and casting varying shadows on the mountain slopes, and the keen November air tempered by genial sunshine—what would you have that was better? We sat among the young oak trees at the top and looked down into every valley and into the villages, which clung to rocky heights around their feudal castles. Half the world lay before us, as they say here.

We reached home at twilight, and had quite forgotten the ball! The handmaidens and all their girl friends were busy in the kitchen rolling out yards of *maccheroni*, mixing sauces, stirring soups in large *marmites*, and setting about their work with an air of importance and proprietorship. They had taken the ball and us into their charge. Just as we were enjoying a rest, music suddenly struck

up beneath the windows, and, looking out, we saw, to our dismay, a whole crowd of musicians toiling up the path behind a torch-bearer. We summoned the "President of the ball" to explain, who arrived looking pale and worried, spread out his hands and expressed a sense of Fate in the event by a gesture of his shoulders.

"*Ma, Signora*, everyone wanted to come, and what could I do?"

Certainly he did not look like one able to cope with the citizens of Brunella.

"No, *Signora*, they are not all musicians," he said, in reply to my question. "Have patience, I implore you, *Signora*; this is much on my conscience. Those who could play brought their instruments, thinking, *Signora*, that you would not be angry—one who was not a musician said he would beat time, another offered to hold the music, and another to turn over the pages—and that is how it happened."

The first moments of annoyance having passed, we thought it best to take the incident as a compliment, and so we bade them all welcome. The kitchen doors flew open and they streamed in, making us a magnificent bow as they passed. Dante the tinman, Ulisse the mason, and Giuseppe the shoemaker followed up the rear, and promptly set to work to lay the table in the laundry-room, while the musicians, seeing that supper was not ready, quietly sat down and began to play. Considering they were not professionals, they

played remarkably well. Every now and then Mariannina looked through the glass doors, waving a wooden spoon in time with the music, and hurried back again to her *marmites*. The men sat round the long tressel-tables, while Dante and the rest dived in among them with dishes and flasks of red wine. The men's faces, in the diffused light of the *lucerne*, looked unusually dark against the white walls.

When their meal and smoke was over, at about eight o'clock, each musician took up his instrument in one hand and his chair in the other and went upstairs on tiptoe, so as not to wake a certain small person. A few extra guests and our peasant friends added to the procession. We had intended to play the rôle of an aged couple and sit beside the log fire in the *Sala*, but when the music struck up, and we heard the sound of many feet, the spirit of youth returned to us, and we too were whirling round to the sound of some familiar tune. Ulisse, seated at the open window, watched the fun with the usual twinkle in his brown eye, and afterwards criticised our dancing. We danced far too quickly for his taste; the slower paces were more to his liking, and, as he expressed, *più di scuola*, and he understood these things. Having pronounced judgment with an air of authority he sat down again upon the model's platform, resting a hand caressingly on a *fiasco* of red Tuscan wine.

As I was reposing after the exertion of dancing on a marble floor, Dandolo, the owner of horses and

carriages in Brunella, suddenly appeared hastening across the room, holding an immense bouquet of roses, carnations and sweet herbs. He stood erect before me, clicked his heels together, and then, with a low bow, gave me the flowers, saying that he had brought them from Carrara, knowing we were *appassionati* for flowers.

Our company was varied, and they each had their own style of dancing. Dante, dressed as a huntsman, whirled his partner round with the air of one who knew his worth; he had not been expected to dance, as his wife had only been dead a month, but the music had acted upon him like a spell, and he never stopped in his mad career the whole evening.

The *Presidente del ballo*, I imagine, owing to his fore-lock, danced very slowly and impressively, with his hand plastered high up on his partner's back. His mode of progression was not popular, but owing to his social position in the town everyone thought it a favour to be his partner. The peasant lads sat with shining eyes gazing at the scene, and, encouraged by the boys of *il Milanin*, threw paper ribbons over the dancers as they passed, filling up spare moments eating jam and chocolate cakes. Assunta, the mother of the peasant lads, appeared only at intervals: sometimes she only thrust her head in at the door for a glimpse of the gay scene and was gone again to act as sentinel at the small person's door. In gathered skirts and with a golden kerchief loosely tied round her shoulders she looked magnificent—tall, straight

and strong. A young carter came forward to claim her for a dance; but he had to fight for her as if he had been a Roman carrying off a Sabine bride. All the dancers stopped to watch the tug-of-war, and Assunta's prayers of protest, uttered in her curious raucous voice, almost drowned the music. At last she was whirled away in the peasant-dance, which is a sort of mad jumping polka. Click-clack went her wooden shoes; all steered clear of the breathless couple. Assunta was at last plunged down on to a seat, dazed and speechless, while her partner dived back into the maze of dancers to recover her shoes, and while she stuck out her feet garbed in crimson home-spun stockings, the handsome young carter, laughingly, knelt to put them on.

As the dust began to rise Mariannina wandered in and out among the dancers sprinkling water out of a *fiasco* on to the floor.

At last the dancers flagged, but the musicians continued in a mad frenzy of enjoyment, and their spirit caught two of the children, who at last came out of their shells. A thirteen-year-old daughter of Ulisse, dark and bright-eyed, and a faired-haired friend with delicate features like an English child, began to dance a slow kind of minuet together in a dreamy, thoughtful manner. They moved their arms rhythmically, they leant their heads towards one another as they lingered caressingly on a step, then spun around nimbly on their toes and danced forward hand in hand to a quicker time. Adelina also

executed a *pas à deux* with a young Brunellese, to the great envy of her rivals. Her dancing is no learnt art : it comes to her when the music makes her blood course like fire through her veins, and as the musicians watched her quick elf-like movements and the look of exhilaration on her face, they redoubled their efforts, and she sprang forward in a fresh maze of lightning steps. The music stopped, and we sank back into our chairs exhausted by the sight of so much energy.

Monotony is not a characteristic of life in Italy, for the unexpected is sure to happen, I had occasion to observe to myself, as the Studio doors opened wide and a crowd of unknown women, followed by one tall thin man, appeared in our midst. The Padrone hurried up to tell me that these were the mothers, sisters, etc., of all the musicians and of some of our guests, so, although bewildered, I bade these self-invited guests welcome. This was the explanation of their sudden appearance. Because of the anger of certain rival musicians in Brunella, who used to play for us during the summer, and now were fallen in disfavour, they had feared for the safety of their men-kind, and so braved the dark hillside, with all its terrors of serpents and spirits, and were prepared to defend us, if not with their lives, at least with their presence.

"*Ma che coraggio!*" everyone exclaimed admiringly as they listened to their tale. We could not fail to admire their power of drowning their fears in enjoyment, as we watched them dance

merrily and sip black coffee. Through the open window, during the brief pauses of our music, came the discordant strains of the rival band playing in the *piazza* of Brunella. Consternation fell upon the company, and little groups formed in the centre of the room.

"Hear these musicians," they cried, waving their hands towards the window, "they are without education; they are capable of taking vengeance upon us to-night."

A general murmur followed of "*che sono ignorantissimi!*"—the most wounding epithet which can be thrown at a self-respecting burgher. Ulisse at this point became loquaciously brave. Usually the most simple and modest of people, after a few glasses of "Poggio Gherardo" wine he becomes communicative about his own virtues and achievements. He now stood in an attitude before me, and declared, in a long rambling speech, that he would protect us. There were few men like him when he was roused, he declared; and he was roused now, he said, slapping his chest and trying to look ferocious. "*Io, io, . . .*" he was beginning again, seeing me smile, but his speech was lost in the call for one last dance.

I now saw the Signora Fausta, who up till now had sat with the matrons on my right hand, wound up in a shawl and complaining of a swollen eye, being led forth to the dance by the station-master. Paolo stood in the centre of the couples forming for the quadrille, very much in the way. As an encouragement to the dancers he waved his arms

about in all directions like a mad wind-mill. The other master of the ceremonies was the third violinist, who on a sudden impulse had thrown down his instrument and rushed in to direct the figures. He pranced from one foot to another, as he screamed out directions to the bewildered couples; he had tied a large white handkerchief round his neck, and the perspiration streamed from his forehead and lank black hair. The general excitement made the air electric: all seemed to feel that it was necessary to concentrate all possible enjoyment into these last few minutes.

At last there was silence, and we were standing on the landing bidding our guests farewell. The women murmured innumerable polite speeches to us, the carters and peasants gripped our hands, speechless but smiling, the boys pulled at our fingers and clutched at their caps, while the station-master and his subordinate startled us by bowing so low that we thought they would rick their backs. Then they all trooped downstairs on tiptoe, for Assunta's warning finger was on her lips. Looking over the banister we caught sight of Adelina, shy, timid little Adelina, as one transformed by the spirit of the dance still upon her. She was standing on the top of the last flight of steps bidding "adieu" with the most delightful air of hostess. She bowed to each guest in turn, and, as they shook hands, they murmured thanks and apologies for the trouble they had given, while she smiled graciously and kept saying "*Punto disturbo, punto disturbo.*"

Torches were lit on the terrace—the smell of pitch and smoke came back to us in the house. We hurried to the studio window to watch the lights disappear down among the rocks and to listen for any sound of battle ; but the Brunellese were already abed, and our musicians were suffered to pass unchallenged through the village. All we heard was the retreating strains of violins and guitars, as one by one the lights disappeared at the turn of the little street.

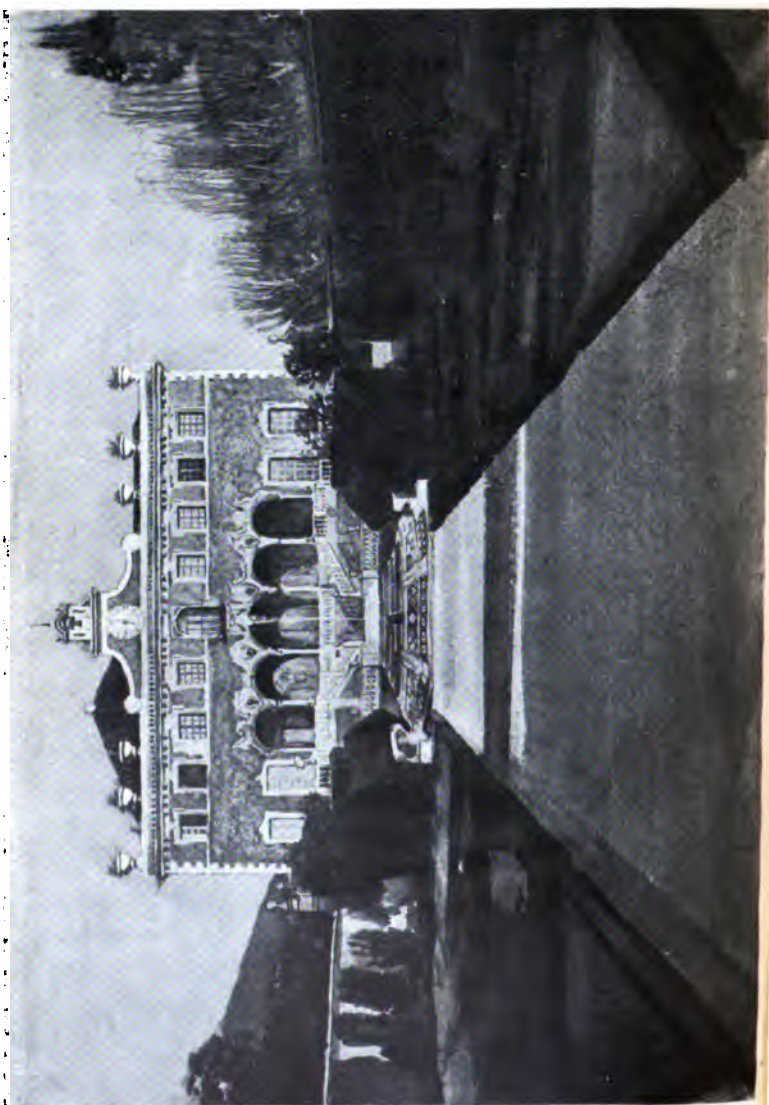
Next day it was reported to us that we had met with the approval of our new friends—that they had praised our hospitality and that the rival musicians were “ bursting with rage.”

X

MANDRIGNANO

*Il proprietario della campagna trema sei mesi dal freddo e sei
dalla paura*

ONE hot day in early Spring we had gone rather far afield on our bicycles, and turning off the high road went along between the olive trees towards a distant hill crowned with a castle and fortified village. The monotony of the long straight road was abruptly broken by a semicircle of great ilexes and a piece of sward, of which the garden wall of a villa formed the base. A low double staircase with large drinking-troughs for passing animals, the water dripping from grotesque heads, led up to closed iron gates. The air was full of the scent of violets and the sound of splashing water from some fountain. It was no wonder that the garden and villa we caught a sudden glimpse of through the gates should have seemed to us, living among peasants in the backwoods of a mountain valley, as an apparition sure to fade away again into the heart of the vineyards and undulating olive groves about it. The villa and the great marble vases, which lined the roof, stood out clear cut against the sky, the pink façade had faded to old rose tints, the plaster decorations about the windows



were dulled to mellow tones, the whole was gay but with the gaiety of a primrose. This was a home of the eighteenth century, and a feeling of old days still clung about it. Whenever I call up the picture of Mandrignano it always seems peopled with a bevy of ladies in flowered gowns and with powdered hair, and sedan chairs stand at the gates. They flutter round a proud-looking Marchesa, who once ruled a miniature kingdom from the Castle-town high on the neighbouring hill, and whose portrait hangs in the picture gallery of the villa. Some stand in the *loggia* leaning on the balustrade between the creamy white columns, and talk with others on the double flight of steps leading into the garden.

The formal garden seemed all part of the house, and we were afterwards surprised to hear that it had only been remade, comparatively speaking, a few years ago. The Marchese told his three gardeners one day (two of them are little more than farm labourers) that he would like to have flower-beds shaped in circles, Maltese crosses and other geometrical patterns, each edged with box, and the thing grew into a Renaissance design of wonderful completeness. The central interest was a fountain surrounded by four marble seats, protected from every wind by tall and closely-clipped box hedges, which formed austere kinds of high-backed sofas. It was too early for flowers, and the lemon trees in their big terra-cotta vases were still under shelter. Only some standard bushes of japonica, scarlet

wind-flowers, and white winter candytuft were in blossom.

But an Italian garden does not depend for its charm only upon a show of flowers; if such were the case what fleeting moments of happiness we should enjoy in a land where irises, roses and banksias burst out in a mad profusion for one brief spell. But what delight it is on a hot summer's day to steal away into a dense wood of trimmed ilexes and look back down a vista of cypress avenues, with here and there a gleam of statues, and beyond a balustrade measuring a radiant distance of valley and hills.

Finding all the garden gates closed we passed round to the other side, where we came upon the footman shouldering a gun and holding a greenfinch up by its leg.

"I gave him the right barrel," he said; "he looked at me round the trunk of an olive, and then I brought him down with a second barrel."

"Have you had much sport?" we asked.

"I and the gardener have taken three birds."

"Now?"

"Oh, no, this month."

From the glaring sunshine of the Spring day we passed into a dimly-lit hall at the back of the house, unexpectedly austere and mediæval looking. The kitchen opened out on the right. It was on the old plan, with a raised hearth beneath an immense hooded chimney-piece, where an ox could have been roasted. Even the biggest turkey turning on the

spit before the log fire would look but a pigeon. Most of the cooking is done on the charcoal range, which occupied one side of the room. On the opposite side ran an uninterrupted table of white marble, the front cased in with wood to form cupboards like a dresser. Italian kitchens always seem to me unusually clean ; but this one, besides its picturesqueness, was the neatest I had ever seen. Directly the mid-day meal was over, the cook, in cap and apron, and the odd man who helped him, swiftly passed damp cloths over shining tables and tiled range, and polished the copper pots they had just used, which they hung up among the others gleaming above the dresser.

The fires were let out, and the place seemed to fall asleep until the evening meal. And over all presides a little marble relief of the Madonna, before which a light burns day and night.

The rest of the ground floor was occupied by offices, cellars, and store-rooms of all kinds—the house proper began on the first floor. The reason of this is easy to understand, if we remember that the idea of the Italian country house has grown out of the fortified house. In the villa big windows had to be well out of reach, while on the ground floor they were all small and heavily barred. It was an immense improvement using the ground floor for offices, and so raising the whole living house up on to a great platform with an interrupted view and a double flight of steps leading down into the garden. The plan of an Italian villa, often a complete square

with a central courtyard, is evolved from the Roman villa. Villa Palmieri at Florence shows it in an early stage, the open and columned courtyard and fountain still complete as Boccaccio described it in the "Decameron." In other villas the open court is often closed in and used as a room, as at Mandrignano, where it became a great ballroom reaching to the roof, only with the difference that here, although it occupied nearly half the house, it was placed at the side. The rooms occupied two sides, the *loggia* coming in the centre of the third side, with a private chapel and winter dining-room at either end. The four bedrooms on the *Pian Nobile* had probably been intended for reception rooms. Without them it left no sitting-room beyond the immense ballroom and winter and summer dining-room. Upstairs came more bedrooms, a long portrait gallery, and a library. A great difference which always strikes me between an Italian and an English house is the absence of privacy. All the rooms have an astonishing amount of doors, the reason being that the Italian has two great ideas when he builds a house—that it should be cool in summer, and, above all, give a sense of spaciousness. On festive occasions doors are thrown open, and the guests wander through suites of apartments and look down long galleries hung with family portraits. Beginning at one corner of the house, they can make the entire circuit without ever retracing their steps.

Although small, as Italian villas go, Mandrignano

seemed on a regal scale, but by this I do not wish to wrong it by comparing it to a royal villa filled with gilt furniture and mosaic tables. The owner was a man of taste, and had brought to light from the attics things despised by a former generation, and added considerably to the nucleus of old furniture left by his predecessor. Each bedroom was hung with different silks, curtains, bed-spread and canopy complete; some were gay with pale blue Lucca silk decorated with a design of crowns and wreaths of oak leaves worked in golden ribbon of different widths. Another room was hung with green silk, the next with gold and red brocade. The walls, all frescoed with architectural designs, in the somewhat fantastic manner of the eighteenth century, gave a delightful sense of completeness. Even the smallest piece of furniture toned with its surroundings: sometimes it was *intarsia*, sometimes of painted wood. The writing desks were mostly Venetian; one had little figures on it cut out of engravings, coloured, and set in a landscape painted by hand, the whole brought cleverly together into the general scheme and made to glow with warm and mellow colour. We were amused to notice that even the butler's room was full of lovely furniture: his washing-stand was hidden by a seventeenth century screen with painted flowers and frolicking Cupids, his collar hung on a delicately carved gilt mirror, and his quilted coverlet was of maroon-coloured brocade stitched down in a quaint Renaissance pattern. The poor man would gladly ex-

change these refinements for a room under the eaves which he might plaster with picture post-cards, but, the owner being so much away, he has to sleep on the first floor.

Everywhere we saw indications that the Marchese was a lover of order—*molto preciso*, as the expression is. Even the baskets for soiled linen and waste-paper were covered with silk or brocade. The house was no museum; one felt throughout that it was loved and cared for. Perhaps an English person straight from a warm and carpeted home might have shivered even on that sunny day at the sight of shining marble floors. We did not see a stove in the place, and only the winter dining-room owned a fire-place. The Italian winter, which can often be severe at times, is short, and there is always the resource of a hat and coat!

After making the *giro* of the house we entered the ballroom. It was so large that it dwarfed all the furniture, but the cleverly conceived scheme of fresco decoration on the walls and on the curved ceiling saved it from any look of bareness. A further effect had been obtained by a very favourite Italian device. Glancing back from the far end of the room through the open doors, we seemed to look up a stately staircase which led up into unknown regions. It was certainly a magical transformation of a small piece of blank wall, and the artist had not even forgotten the hanging lamp of wrought iron-work. The butler, thoroughly enjoying our surprise, hurried to the opposite end of the room and flung

open the other double doors. And through the damask curtains we saw the white marble columns of the *loggia* framing the garden, and beyond again the ilex trees and delicate outline of blue hills.

In the hall a candle and matches stood ready, in the dining-room the table was laid for dinner, so we naturally imagined that the Marchese was at home. But the servant told us rather sadly that he had not been at Mandrignano for some time, and they never quite knew when to expect him from town, but everything was always kept in readiness in case the spirit might move him to come. We seemed to have found a palace in a fairy tale inhabited by the mythical Prince. The sensation was only enhanced when we were taken down to see the *Orciaio*. We entered a long narrow room with a low vaulted ceiling, and, looking down on either side upon a succession of Titanic marble sarcophagi, we thought we had come upon the family sepulchres on a somewhat imperial scale. Fitful shadows filled this silent chamber.

The servant laughed and lifted up the lids—the tanks were full of golden oil.

The next year that we came to Mandrignano we were fortunate to find the owner himself, a Marchese of the old school, courteous, kindly and with a keen interest on many subjects. Although rich and belonging to one of the most ancient and renowned of Italian great families, he is the simplest of men, and in the country lives with less state than

an ordinary English squire. In his well-ordered archives he showed us some of the family papers, ranging from private letters from grand dukes of the last century to Imperial edicts still showing the seal of Barbarossa. In those mediæval days the family had been powerful for more than three hundred years.

It is said of Tuscans, whose frugality has sometimes been described by another term, that they object to entertainment on the score of expense. My own theory is that while this may be partly true, there is another reason which is consistent with the Italian character. When an Italian gives an entertainment he likes it to be on a regal scale; he will ask you to a state luncheon or dinner, but never to "share pot luck." If even a small amount of entertainment would mean depriving the family of the means of keeping a carriage and pair, well then, they would all prefer to pinch and economise, as only Italians know how, in order to drive in the *Corso* or the *Cascine* and bow to their friends in solemn state.

The owner of Mandrignano was not one of these. He lived simply because such suited his tastes; he did not entertain because he was a bachelor, though once he had thought of giving a big peasant ball to his retainers, but his courage failed and a fear for his furniture prevented him. And he did ask us to lunch at mid-day—*alla buona*, as he modestly called his excellent meal, when we were preparing to go away and eat hard-boiled eggs under his ilexes.

He had paid a visit to England, and three things seem to have struck him : the quiet, big open spaces in the heart of London, all free to the people, the park round a country house, and the innumerable meals consumed at what seemed to him very odd hours. For although an Italian talks an immense amount about his food—what he likes, can eat, and cannot eat, has eaten that day and is going to eat that evening—he really consumes far less than we do. I think our kind host was at first nervous lest he should not be able to provide enough food for these hungry northerners.

As we walked about the vineyards in the afternoon we were struck by the way in which the Marchese appeared to share his property with the people. He agreed that it was sometimes annoying when they did not respect his wishes and would startle him by shooting just under his windows, but to preserve his property from trespassers he said would entail too much trouble and expense. He himself was not "a sportsman," he declared. His uncle before him had erected a little hut on a hillock in the midst of a spinny, in which he would sometimes sit the whole day long with his call-birds, waiting to gather in a bag of "game." Just below the semicircle of ilexes in a dell he showed us a long narrow strip of bay trees, a delightful wilderness where nets used to be stretched across the centre on poles, and close by an owl perched with a looking-glass on the ground to attract the inquisitive small birds. Beaters helped to drive them into the trap, when

they were drawn in like so many fish. Now the hillock is a fruitful vineyard and the nets have all fallen to pieces. Evidently the Marchese's heart did not lie in agriculture or else he could not have looked on so complacently at the local sportsmen peppering his olive trees and vines. He is not one of those who, keen to see their lands tilled in a modern system of agriculture, have done away with the *Mezzeria* system and work the farms with day labourers. Everything continues in a peaceful and patriarchal way at Mandrignano. The peasants cut the corn with the sickle, thrash it with a flail and sift it with a winnowing basket; the oxen draw the light ploughs between the vines, and in the early autumn bring the carts full of purple grapes up to the door, and through the hall the tubs are carried into the cavernous cellars, where immense vats are ready for the wine-making. When the vintage nears the rallying-point of everyone's *villeggiatura*, the Marchese hurries away to his castle on the hill, for the merry confusion it brings strikes a dread into his order-loving soul. The even tenour of his day seemed to us all a counterpart of his Arcadian surroundings. The morning he spends among his archives arranging and sorting family papers, or perhaps he paints an old chair, for his chief passion is furniture and bric-à-brac and all the delights such things entail. In the afternoon at a certain hour he walks round part of his property with the *Fattore*. Then after a solitary meal he retires to the kitchen, and round that capacious

hearth he sits among his servants and labourers ; he reads them the newspaper, they tell him the news of the country-side, and they discuss the coming harvest. Truly only an Italian gentleman could thus foregather with his dependants and keep his house in order.

XI

SOME BRUNELLESE FRIENDS

Il denaro viene in casa con lo zoppo e si parte col postiglione

WE were returning late one evening from a long walk when the servants ran out to tell us that the band of Brunella was on its way up the hill, with all its battery of brass instruments, to serenade us. We hastily assembled by the front door, and, standing upon a heap of stones where once had been a drawbridge, we did our best to play the part of royalty for such an occasion.

Their first tune was "God save the King," which for the last week they had practised in the *piazza*, and played like a funeral dirge. It was to be the surprise of the evening for the home-sick English people. One of us began loyally to sing; a retainer behind said "Hush!"

Perhaps the music was not very good, but we liked it and enjoyed the whole scene. The men stood in a large circle on the terrace, which juts out on the ledge of the rocks above the river; two small boys stood before each musician, one to hold the music, the other a torch. The hills seemed to rise up unusually high about us, and were only faintly outlined in the darkness, which gave strange

vividness to the flaring lights on shining trumpet and the upturned faces of the men. Eager faces of village children peered through the closed iron gates.

Between the pauses of the droning music we heard the call of the owls and the rush of the ceaseless rivers.

We now no longer felt like strangers in Brunella, and each day brought us more in contact with the people. Their names even were a possession. But having mastered them, confusion arose, for we soon discovered that half the town were known by nicknames. The butcher is never called anything but *il Papa*, like his father before him, who was given to laying down the law. The father of our servant is known only as *il Maschio*, which was the joyful cry at his birth; he had been preceded by five sisters. His wife is always spoken of as "the wife of the *Maschio*," and there are many in the town who would not know to whom we referred if we used his real name. A family of inn-keepers are on the road to forgetting their original name themselves. The grandfather as a little boy had been nicknamed *Sansfaçons* by a French artist, who had been amused by the boy's independence and character. Now a sign-board over the door informs travellers that they have arrived at the *Albergo Sansfaçons*, and the Signora Sansfaçons and all her host of Sansfaçons sons, daughters and grandchildren hasten out to wait upon them.

When a man's name happens to please the popular fancy, he is allowed to retain it. Achille is always Achille, the corn merchant, who sits all day like a fat spider among his sacks and literally rakes money in from all sides. Twenty years ago he was thankful to earn a few pence by fiddling at a village dance, and he has worked as a navvy and carried as many heavy loads as he has hairs on his head. Then suddenly and mysteriously he became a small contractor on the new railway line, and fortune smiled. No one ever gets the better of Achille. When I come in to his shop to change a cheque he makes a low bow and smiles urbanely as he dives into a drawer full of money. With old-fashioned courtesy he called me *Madonna Lina*, so I forgive him his cunning little eyes, which seem to calculate to a *centesimo* what everybody is worth.

The local sportsman, a small man with flourishing moustaches and a very long gun, is Dante the tinman. His shop is hung with foxes, martens and otters, and he is always dressed in sporting attire—*alla cacciatora*. Once when he offered us a bunch of blackbirds strung together by the neck, which he said made an excellent roast, we seized upon the occasion to deliver a lecture on the shooting of singing-birds. He listened so attentively that we rejoiced at having made an impression on an important convert, until, looking up with eyes very wide open, he exclaimed, "*Ah! Sangue della Madonna!* then you have no sport in England!"

Decidedly an open-air feeling surrounds our friendships and acquaintances in the town. We chatter with them in the *piazza*, on the doorsteps of their shops, or picnic with them on a hill-side. A great meeting-place is the *caff *, and the most frequented will be the one with the biggest glass door and the best view of the most frequented street. Here the advocate meets his client, friends discuss the news of the day, and old customers write their letters; here the schoolmaster, directly after his mid-day meal, hurries to play a game with those delightful figured cards before the school-bell should ring, and at eve he is back again. I have even known a *caff * chosen as a meeting-place between a runaway wife, her lover and her husband, who all wished to come to some amicable settlement of their affairs. An Italian's home may be compared to the snail's shell; wherever you meet him, sipping coffee at a little round table, chatting at a chemist's shop, smoking in the *piazza*, or leaning over a wall discussing the country with a host of friends, he seems equally to belong to the place and to be perfectly at ease and contented. At certain hours, in the early morning and at nightfall when the express trains come in, the Brunella station becomes the rallying-point for all our friends. "One sees a little of the world," says the doctor, who thrills every time the express arrives. "I like to see who comes and who goes," says the schoolmaster, and he has never been known to miss his evening visit to the platform. You may smile, oh English

reader, at the Southerner's insatiable curiosity. I, too, have jeered, but am cautious now, and confess to a pair of opera-glasses ever ready on my window-sill.

Twice in the year, on Christmas Day and Easter Sunday, the doors of the Italian home are closed upon the family, and it is not etiquette to pay a call. But next day the streets are full of life once more : the Signora puts on her smartest clothes and parades the *Corso* with her husband and children, and the band goes in procession through the town. Brunella has no *Corso*, so our carriage-drive has become the chosen walk. On ordinary Sundays the Signora walks with her friends, followed by a bevy of children. Custom does not demand the attendance of their husbands, who spend their holiday either stalking birds on the hill-sides, perhaps hunting a fox, or playing a lively game of cards or billiards.

To the outsider the Italian woman appears to pass a dull existence ; but we must remember that both her motherhood and housewifery she takes with a passionate intensity, and that the house becomes to her a veritable kingdom. Purposely I use the word "house." While she is the best of manageresses, and everything about her is neat and garnished, the food excellent, and her economy a marvel, the indescribable feeling of "home," as we understand the word, is entirely missing. Two things are absent, and I know not which is the most important—the genial fire ever ready to welcome

the home-comers and entice them to draw their chairs round the hearth, and a wife allowed to take some share in her husband's intellectual interests. With her, economy positively becomes a vice; everything revolves round the question of making a franc go its full limit and even of performing a miracle, and any subject beyond has little power to interest her. Thus it happens that the husband goes his own way, and his wife contentedly views the world from her window. I have often seen a husband dine alone at the local hotel, while his wife dines in the kitchen with the servant. It is by no means unusual for him to mix in society and never expect his hostess to call upon his wife, who remains to the end of her days the same simple woman whom he married when still a student, or a struggling young professor or writer.

Our friend the Signora Marianna perhaps proves an exception that the hearth fire is only the symbol of the home and not an essential part of it. There are many reasons why I love Marianna, but one is that, when I have shown her a new book, a kodak or a thermos bottle, she never says: "Dear me, who knows what that has cost, a whole mountain of money!" As I had always heard her called "the widow of poor Massimo," when I went to pay my first visit I expected to find a sad-eyed widow; I found a sprightly, cheery woman, possessed of an extremely good-looking husband. Signor Orfeo was an early love of hers; but both being poor, she

had first married a well-to-do inn-keeper, "poor Massimo." Three brothers, Orfeo, Giovanni and Salone, have gone their different ways; the first became the manager of a lottery bank and prospered, the next is a lawyer in Rome, and has been knighted; the third is our local blacksmith. All three were tall and handsome, and not the least distinguished is the blacksmith.

The Signora received me with delightful courtesy, and entertained me with a flow of talk. Her grief was profound that I should prefer to sit in her bright, clean kitchen, with its array of shining copper pots and a wide view across the valley, rather than in the *Salottino*.

At all events I must see the house. It was neat and bright as a new pin. Although an Italian bedroom has every necessity, there is a comfortable emptiness which I always envy; the spaciousness and extreme tidiness, which is only possible with few possessions, gives a delightful feeling of restfulness. The chief object is always the immense bed, which, even in the houses of the artisan and peasant class, is very comfortable, and a costly object, with a mattress of vegetable down and one of good wool. Every year the mattresses are remade, the covers washed, and the stuffing picked over and aired in the sun. We Northerners have much to learn from an Italian house-frau. In the great pride she takes in her house Signora Marianna is no exception to the rule. She showed us a big cupboard full of good linen, all made on

the hand-loom, and ornamented with peasant lace of every design. I coveted a bed-spread made entirely of crochet work; even the pillow-cases were edged with lace.

Marianna is a true daughter of the Church, and every bedroom had its little altar with a statue of the Madonna, and a lamp ever burning before it. In the summer-time a fresh nosegay is always gathered for the household *lares* and in the winter-time the Signora makes marvellous flowers out of velvet and silk, which miraculously sprout out of vases filled with emerald green moss.

The sitting-room, proudly referred to as the *Sala di ricevimento*, had the cheerless look of a room but seldom used. There was all the regulation furniture: the round table in the middle, six chairs, the sofa where the honoured guest sits upon the right of her hostess, and in front of it the familiar carpet with the peaceful lion woven in yellow against a background of vivid green ferns. The sideboard was full of gaily painted china, only used upon festive occasions; the table covered with gifts from travelled friends—an alabaster cow from Volterra, an ox-cart in marble from Carrara, and straw letter-cases adorned with blue ribbons from Fiesole. Every object and ornament looked as if it had been mesmerised into position and was never likely to be released.

Marianna particularly asked me to admire the life-size photograph of her late husband, and while I listened to her enumerations of his good looks

and moral perfections, Signor Orfeo looked on gravely. As we adjourned to the kitchen again she called out: "Orfeo, go quickly to the cellar and bring us some of poor Massimo's wine. Ah, he knew how to make good wine, my Massimo," she said, eyeing the golden wine fizzling in her glass. Orfeo nodded between each sip. For an Italian he is unusually silent. It is his wife's one complaint that he can eat solemnly through a meal without saying a word, and, what is infinitely more trying, seldom listens to her perpetual flow of conversation. She has an eye on everyone in the town, and knows each new turn in the politics of the Commune. Her views on social questions are keen and decided, and she often gives her friends a piece of her mind on what she calls the degeneration of the present day. When we suggest that at least now the people are more prosperous, it produces a veritable storm of abuse against the peasant women, who, in her day, were content with the bare necessities of life; and now—why, she had actually seen these peasants with a bundle of brushwood on their head and a silk kerchief about their necks; yes, and sometimes they come to church in a silk blouse! Signora Marianna looks very stern as she declares that luxury has entered the gates of Brunella. She deplores the fact of having to pay a labourer two francs a day instead of half that sum, as in "those good old days." It all comes, she says, because of these horrid Socialists, who talk to the people every Sunday in the *piazza* and put such strange new-

fangled ideas into the heads of the young men. "A peasant with a silk handkerchief, indeed!"

Twenty years ago other friends the Cristani owned half Brunella and many a smiling *podere* along the river and up among the hills. But when their old grandfather married again and allowed everything to slip into the young step-mother's keeping, one by one the farms were sold for the benefit of the second brood, until nothing now remains to them but a small apartment in the old Benedictine monastery, which forms the promontory of Brunella where the two rivers meet.

In the days of the Cristani prosperity, two brothers, wandering pedlars, often came with their small wares, and were grateful for the plate of rice and soup given them for "love of the Madonna." These same brothers now own many of the Cristani farms, where they spend the summer months. Often I pass their shop in the town, where they never seem to cease from measuring out yards of linen to a crowd of customers. Some of it is that delightful coarse linen made on the hand-loom. In an out-of-the-way mountain village, I know an old, old woman who sits all day weaving for these brothers at starvation wages — a halfpenny a yard, and a meal when the piece is finished. From a steep and narrow lane I have often watched the outline of her bent figure in the dim light of the

low-arched doorway ; click, clack, the sound followed all the way up the street.

The Cristani do not sit and moan over their past affluence, but most of them have set their shoulder to the wheel with all the energy of born artisans. Fileo, our carpenter, and Anacleto, his elder brother, live with their old mother of eighty-three, and are looked after partly by her and partly by Fileo's pretty young wife. Something of the old spirit of Italian life, so fast disappearing, lives on in this quiet corner of Brunella. Everything centres round the mother, who is a vigorous old lady, with abundance of character and in full possession of her faculties. Her cheeks are full, smooth, and still retain the colour of youth ; she has always had excellent health, and the peace, which she has enjoyed all her life, seems to cast an atmosphere of contentment about her. Since she came to this house as a bride more than sixty years ago the Signora Cristani has never moved out of it, except, as she told me, to go to church (it is next door) or take the air of a summer's evening on the bridge and a little way up the road, accompanied by her husband and followed by all her children. It is impossible to exaggerate the position of the Italian mother—*la madre*—who, however little she may share the outside interests of husband and sons, exerts an extraordinary influence over them all. Indeed, one may say that she wields a power of life and death : for often a son's career is altered by her wishes, and a husband has, for



A GARDEN WITHIN THE TOWN WALLS



instance, allowed a lucrative position to escape him in deference to her desire to live always in their native town.

The first time I went to see the Cristani, Fileo told me that his mother also was an artist, and showed me her pictures with immense pride. They had about them the remembrance of lavender sachets and bowls of pot-pourri. How had this bride learnt to draw flowers with so delicate a pencil, and arrange them in elegant bouquets in the style of our grandmothers? There was also a blackbird sitting up very tall and straight on a twig which had quite a Japanese look about it.

"One sees that the blackbird is singing, *non è vero?*" said Fileo. Until her brood of children claimed her time, she sat all day by the window, from where she could see the belfry of the parish church and the garden of the old monastery, where the white lilies still flower for St Anthony's feast in the embrasures of the town wall, and painted these pictures "just for beauty." I had taken the family by surprise the afternoon I called. The old mother, as she had been ill, was sitting in her bedroom, and a rosy-cheeked child of a year old slept by her on a sofa. Everything was spotlessly clean and tidy, but bare of all except the necessities of life. The most furnished part of the room was the wall at the head of the bed, where innumerable sacred pictures, medals, crucifixes and holy water-stoups hung in festoons against the green and crimson stencilled wall. One treasure, made by a cousin

many years ago, the *madre* unhooked and showed me: it represented the adoration of the shepherds; the stables had been made of different straws and the figures cut out of an illustrated book or paper; a count's crown and the initials of the Cristani were painted in gold upon the fluffy tails of the sheep, the sole remaining testimony of past gentility.

The whole family had now assembled in the bedroom, and even in this quiet abode I was not allowed to escape without the bottle of wine. A special bottle of an old vintage, from their last remaining farm, was brought in upon a brass salver; a spotless napkin was spread upon my knees and a footstool placed under my feet. The men stood, the *madre* settled down to enjoy herself, and the young wife sat by me with her baby clinging about her neck and curling up its pink toes in lively expectation of a sponge cake dipped in the wine. I protested against the custom of giving wine to such young children, and, as usual, was worsted in my attempts at reform.

"Ah!" said the young mother proudly, "you can have no idea, *Signora*, what a stomach *my* child has; she can digest anything; it is all a question of habit; she likes the wine, dear little thing, and it makes her cheeks red. You perhaps do not know the proverb, *Signora*: 'Good wine makes good blood.'"

Certainly Italian children look healthy enough; perhaps it is the case of the survival of the fittest.

The old mother confessed that she could not do without her daily glass of wine. This one she sipped with the air of a connoisseur, and, with many apologies to my illustrious presence, she explained with great naivety what infinite good it did her digestion—"a little wind and then I feel so well"—while the sons both said "truly, truly," very impressively.

I was grateful to the family—they did not force the wine upon me with barbaric hospitality, but upon my refusing a second glass only held the bottle out invitingly towards me, saying with much feeling, "Signora, we will not press you again to take more wine, because we know that it is not the habit in your country to drink at this hour. But we wish you to know that we offer it to you with all our hearts, and welcome you to our poor house."

We all bowed to each other, smiled, and then resumed conversation. The dear old mother said little, but her dignified presence seemed to keep the balance of conversation; she sat with her hands folded on her lap, and her black skirts fell in heavy folds about her. Fileo stood behind his wife, smiling down proudly upon her and the baby. Anacleto was evidently looked upon as the spokesman of the family; and, like Signora Marianna, his grievance was the degeneration of Brunella. Enthusiastically he spoke of bygone days, when Brunella lived in one great brotherhood, and, if you needed a hundred francs, it was lent willingly and without even an I.O.U., for each one trusted the other.

"Now all is changed," said Anacleto, fiercely ; "in those days to be a *galantuomo* was something to be proud of, now in the race for money he is looked on with pity, and all is changed ; these cursed elections and thieving money-lenders—excuse me, Signora," and here he mopped his brow, "these blessed elections have ruined everything. One person votes black, another white, and the town is divided like an army on its road to battle. No one has any peace now-days ; everyone wants to outstrip his neighbour in the race. And the war-cry is, '*avanti, avanti, sempre avanti!*' Signor Tale wants to become a deputy—that, of course, means stepping into Paradise for him and his family," continued Anacleto, with a sneer, while his mother nodded wisely and Fileo looked on admiringly, and the wife tickled the baby's toes, who gurgled approvingly.

"Signor Tale is anything but sure of getting enough votes, so he looks around to see what he can promise as a bribe for staunch supporters. Sometimes it is a fountain for the village he promises, to be paid for out of his own pocket if only they will give him votes. Oh ! he is so generous ! And for all this he had a cartload of votes—not forgetting the votes of those dead citizens of Lucera—God rest their souls!—who for the last ten years have voted from their graves."

I looked puzzled at such a miraculous proceeding, and he hastened to explain :

"It happens in this way—the names of several voters, who have been dead quite a long time, have

purposely never been struck off the Communal register; it is very convenient for the living, especially for the Syndic, who can thus get quite a following without any promises or wasting of breath."

Anacleto hinted that some of his adherents in the Commune were about as independent as the voters of Lucera. He told me a story of a notary who, wanting witnesses to some document, chose out two members of the Communal council. He was puzzled to find they had both signed the same name, which happened to be the name of the member of parliament of the district. When he expostulated, they said they were very sorry, but that those were the only words they had ever been taught to write.

I was curious to know how people lived when everyone was so happy and trustful.

"Ah," said Anacleto, "our parents lived like the patriarchs. They cultivated their lands and did not bother their heads about politics—they left that to the Grand Duke; after all, it was his trade. In those days one of our farms, where our grandfather lived for some years, lay at the foot of the Apennines, where a mule-track leads over a pass to Parma. In other directions the roads were very bad, and it took about two days to drive in an ox-cart to a neighbouring town which now one could reach in a *baroccino* in a few hours. Poor women! there was little shopping to be done then for each farm was like a town within itself. We ground our own

flour in our own mill, made our own wine and oil, of course, salted our hams, grew flax, which our peasants made into sheets on the big hand-loom, and wore woollen underclothes made from the wool of our own sheep. When the travelling merchant came round, there was great rejoicing, for he brought us all the news. When our father took a journey, to Lucca or Florence, which perhaps were sixty miles away, the *madre* dressed herself in black until he returned ; and so it was with the wives of our uncles, who lived with us. Now people think less of going to America than they thought then of journeying to Rome."

Looking at his round and smiling countenance I felt somewhat reassured that things were not quite so bad as I had feared. And the tragedy of the Cristani fortunes, does it lie very heavily upon his broad shoulders? He places an affectionate hand upon Fileo's shoulders: "You work too hard," he says. He dances the baby up into the air, smiles at his mother, bows to me, and, nodding cheerfully towards a table in the sitting-room crowded with accounts, which he has to do for the Commune, he goes off to see that his grapes are swelling, and prepares his gun for the next day's stalking of black-birds and green-finches on the hill-side.

"My brother is a famous sportsman," remarks Fileo, as we walk down the street together.

Fileo is quite resigned to a life of perpetual labour ; after all, what would he do if he did not work ? he remarks—he does not care about sport ;

the making of furniture too was more satisfactory ; you saw the result of your toil ; there was nothing elusive about such work ; and as he speaks he hoists his thin shoulder in his shrunk coat, and, putting his head on one side like a marsh bird, steps aside as I enter the shop. It is a dimly-lighted recess with an arched roof, where, with his old partner, he planes and saws all day, and between whiles looks out upon the Brunellese through the glass doors. The children come and play outside, the poorest women come and gather up the shavings for their scanty fires, and he nods to them all in a grave but kindly fashion. His philosophy of life is untouched with bitterness ; and a sense of humour, not often found in the South, keeps him in tune with his surroundings. Very little escapes him, but it is seldom that he favours even his friends with the result of his observations. A visit to Rome, where he went to see an elder sister, a Benedictine abbess, has widened his horizon, and he is not one of those who thinks that Brunella is the hub of the universe. But a week's view of the world was not sufficient to deaden his generous and somewhat unpractical impulses, which savour of the day when his forbears played patron to their neighbours. Instead of overcharging "the English people," he often omits to put down a day or two's work, and, when we remark upon it, he only shrugs his shoulders and says it is a *piccolezza*, and really not worth mentioning. Although less pessimistic about the condition of society than his brother and old

mother, he has fallen into their way of regarding the past as if set in a golden frame. It is always : " Ah ! in those good old times, in those happy days, when my father lived on his own land and minded his vines."

XII

COURTSHIP

Non si fecero mai nozze che il diavolo non ci volesse far la salsa

THE *jeunesse dorée* of Brunella is represented by Mario, a young baker, who spends the whole of his time playing the flute and singing songs of passionate regret for "happy days long past." The plaintive strains rise and fall upon the hillside, as he wanders up and down and round the town followed by his boon companions, who provide him with a droning accompaniment on their guitars. His flute-playing is good, his singing execrable, but it produces loud applause. He throws back his head and half closes his eyes; his cheeks are flushed, and his even white teeth gleam beneath black moustaches, which, as an admirer once said, "are so neat that they seem as if they were painted." At any hour of the day you see him leisurely walking the streets, or sitting at a *caffè* playing cards, and always dressed in what the Brunellese call "English fashion"—a long ulster made of tweed with a check measuring several inches square. With the warm weather he discards this weighty garment, and reveals an elegant suit, cut, I am told, in the latest style. Everyone knew that this suit had come from "the most fashionable tailor of

Florence," had cost three pounds, and would probably never be paid for. When the commercial traveller from this fashionable tailor arrived one day to collect money and new customers, Mario's friends carried him off to the topmost floor of one of their homes, where they remained with closed shutters until the traveller had departed, when they issued forth to play triumphal music. Mario leaves the baking to be done by his mother and aunt, who both look like shadows struggling with a too material world. Through the favour of the communal secretary, his intimate friend, he hopes to get a place in the Commune, which, in the town, is always the height of ambition. He will then earn three francs a day, in return for a little calligraphy lasting from ten to three. Most people, as well as himself, seem to forget that, young as he is, he possesses a wife and two children. The wife, however, often recalls her existence in an undesirable way. Mario married pretty but empty-headed Enrichetta when he was barely seventeen, and she just sixteen, so that they could only be married in the church. Lately it has been made more difficult to escape the civil marriage, which is the only legal one in Italy. Before three years were out Mario began once more his serenades, and neglected his young wife shamefully. But when Enrichetta ran away with a prosperous wine-grocer of Brunella, leaving Mario to be the laughing-stock of the place, he was well paid out. The "running away" was only a geographical expression, for it consisted in her



ITALIAN CHILD

walking into another house provided by the wine-merchant. Most Italians would have used their knives, but Mario is an easy-going fellow, not overburdened with courage, and his rival is one of the most important and prosperous of the Brunellese. So Enrichetta sits at her window, her beautiful, laughing face framed in the green shutters, while her "friend" spends most of the day on the doorstep of his shop, just opposite, smoking an immense Tuscan cigar and dreamily attending to his customers. Her boy and girl passing down the street on their way to school look up at her as to a stranger. "Thy little mother is dead," says the grandmother, stroking the girl's dark curls.

And Mario goes laughingly upon his way; the old and sensible people criticise and blame him severely; the girls hang out of their windows or rush to the door to see him pass. To many he is the ideal youth of their dreams. Alas for our little friend Zelinda; her head has been completely turned by Mario and his serenading. Only last year when she danced for us at the Fortezza she was but a child, and indeed she looks little more now, slender and straight of figure, with a plait down her back, and still wearing short skirts. And with what delight she would often accompany her father and us on a long country ramble, though she would keep silent and demure in all her enjoyment of the day. But her big dark eyes could flash out fire at times, and her clear, dark complexion flush with anger.

Mario has already proposed for her hand, and, as her father, an honest artisan, of course refuses to sanction such a match, there is rumour of an elopement. Sometimes when Zelinda stands at her window, listening to the music and answering the language of Mario's eyes, as he throws back his head and looks straight up at her, his wife appears at her window opposite. Directly he has turned the corner, like an enraged tigress, she begins to threaten a thousand maledictions if Zelinda—"a brazen-faced girl"—dares to accept the homage of her husband. Just as she is responding in all the facile eloquence of the Southerner, Marta, her elder sister, appears upon the scene, sharply closes the window, and locks her up to brood upon her transgressions. The sound of the flute comes from distant corners of the town, and from behind her green shutters Enrichetta hears her husband's song fall clear upon the night air :—

" Ah quei tempi felici ! ah ! che non tornano più ! "

Since writing this a few months have passed, and what we all feared has happened. Mariannina came up one morning breathless with the news that Zelinda had eloped with Mario, and her family were broken-hearted. They had not taken any of the warnings seriously, and instead of sending the girl away to friends in the country, had only redoubled their watch over her. She had simply tossed her head and laughed, saying that she was not going to be so foolish as to run away with

anyone. One who could have told them a good deal was the stout woman at the vegetable store just opposite their house ; but they never suspected why Zelinda liked to run across the street to fetch their *verdura* every day, or why she scanned the cabbage leaves so critically. One evening, while all the family sat at supper, saying that she would go and change her dress—they were going to the theatre—she slipped downstairs, met Mario at the street corner, and together they quietly strolled up the Fortezza hillside. Sitting among the ilexes they looked down upon the station, and could see her father talking to the stationmaster, preparing to send endless telegrams in every direction, while one brother caught a train going up the valley, and another the down express. Then they laughed, and when all the town slept, they walked down the hill to Mario's house.

The town was, as it expressed itself, scandalised, not so much at the elopement, but at the effrontery of "that slip of a girl," who was not in the least ashamed at what she had done, but stood all day at Mario's window, nodding at her friends in the road below. There was much traffic in the street that day, and all the gossips of the place lingered about whispering.

Mario, now employed in a Commune some sixteen miles up the valley, had taken a train at dawn and eluded the father, who wreaked his vengeance on Zelinda, beating her till she was bruised.

There was a good deal of uncertainty at the time whether, in the event of Mario being cited by the father in the tribunal, he would not escape unscathed, as he had not taken the girl away out of the Commune, and she had come to his house. However, later it was discovered that he had tried to engage a carriage to take her right away, but the driver had refused to go, as he said he had daughters of his own. The story brought forward the curious way in which elopements are sometimes made. The girl comes to her lover's house and knocks. "Who is there?" he asks, and when she answers, he pretends not to want her, and tells her to go away, refusing all the time to open the door. The girl then declares that nothing will induce her to go home again, and sits down on the doorstep. The young man turns to his friends, saying: "See, I cannot get rid of her; what am I to do?" and the friends all advise him to open the door and let her stay. The whole little farce is acted to the life, and the witnesses afterwards are ready to swear that the girl forced her way in against the man's will, so that the parents have no redress. This scene recounted to me happened only the other day quite near us.

The afternoon after Zelinda's flight, I hastened down to see our friends, the poor parents. It was like going into the house of the dead. The shutters were closed, and I could only dimly discern their faces. The whole family, including grandchildren and daughters-in-law, sat in a bedroom, the mother

huddled up on the sofa, the father sitting in the centre of the group. Thus they had sat for hours, and meant to sit waiting till the night train came in, bringing home Mario.

"The disgrace of it," they kept saying; "oh! the disgrace." Then the father took the letter out of his pocket, which he had received that day from his daughter, telling them that they must not blame Mario, for it was all her fault. "Nothing will ever make me come home," she said, "one sees the whole thing was Destiny, and I am in Paradise."

"Who knows whom she thinks she has married," said the father, "a king, a very god, but the latch of this house she shall never lift again." Being somewhat Roman in his ways of dealing with his women kind, who are all most submissive except "this bewitched one," he was all for shutting her up in a convent, and getting Mario sentenced to a term of imprisonment—perhaps they would give him three years, he thought.

The picture of Zelinda in a convent drew the flicker of a smile from one of the brothers, and Marta, who had been silently weeping, threw her shawl back and began to speak: "The convent is no use. All these months have I not guarded her like a *Bambin Gesù*? What a life I have led! I never let her out of my sight, and often in the night I would wake up with a start and put my hand out to feel if she were there. But let that pass—say she comes out of the convent after six years, and

has forgotten that man, who, I ask you, will marry her?—she is dishonoured.”

“That is very true,” added the eldest brother, and the mother groaned and rocked herself to and fro.

A younger brother, barely fourteen, broke in impetuously: “Why worry about her any more? she has cast us all off and says she is in Paradise. I say let her stay there, and there’ll be a sack of flour less a year to buy.”

The door flew open and a young man rushed in, who, with a black mantle flung across his shoulders, looked like a mild but flustered brigand, and began volubly to assure the father of his friendship, his condolences, and his complete innocence in the affair. Indeed he had known nothing about it; he was a friend of Mario’s, it was true, but also (he hoped) of their family, from whom he had experienced nothing but kindness and courtesy. As he continued to protest his innocence, the father kept nodding his head placidly and repeating, “I am persuaded.” I felt sure that he had his own suspicions on the subject, but Italians, where sudden excitement does not rob them of their wits, are very cautious in speech unless they have proofs in their hands.

Even in their sorrow their hospitality did not fail, and Marta appeared bringing in a tray of black coffee. Soon after having assured myself that the father meant to take no violent measures, I left. The end was that Mario, after a great deal of talk and an endeavour to secure a bribe from the father,

consented to marry Zelinda, and the bans were immediately published at the *Municipio*. Then the father, as if determined to wreak his vengeance on some one, had a battle royal with the parish priest, who had called him the executioner of his daughter for allowing her to be married to a man already married in the church. It is true that the *Signor Prevosto* might have expressed himself less forcibly, for the word *boia* is looked upon as a great insult. Many of the neighbours tried to quiet down the whole affair; and at last, instead of going into court, the *Prevosto* wrote out a letter of apology duly signed and sealed at the Municipality, in which he withdrew his accusations, and our friend now carries the document about in his pocket and shows it all round. It has acted as a salve to his wounded feelings.

So once more there is peace in Brunella, and "now," say the neighbours, "instead of one woman always at a window there are two."

Signor Nini is the young and dapper little tailor, prosperous and hard-working, whom everyone praises to such an extent that I suspect a hidden wish in their hearts that some healthy naughtiness might develop in this most decorous citizen of Brunella. The Signora Bianca, his mother, who is declared by the neighbours to be as tiresome as a mosquito, rules him with a rod of iron. I have seen her shoot her head out of the window like an enraged turkey to tell him that his work-women were chattering like magpies. He hangs his head out of

the next window, and turns a pale countenance as he patiently listens to a storm of abuse on the race of young women in general and his workers in particular: "All right, mamma, I will see to it," he says. A mild reproof issued in a gentle voice one knows to be the result.

As he never has the heart to refuse anyone, his friends live on him. The Signora Bianca, whose sharp tongue often lets fall much wisdom, says he is like the ass who carries the barrel of wine and drinks water himself. It is only he who hears the word "no." Even the satisfaction of keeping a dog is denied him, as his mother declares it eats too much and earns nothing—a conclusion he cannot refute. So the dog is taken away to a friend some twenty miles off, but escapes and appears, lean and whining, at Signor Nini's door. But it would take more than an Italian mongrel to soften the heart of the Signora Bianca, when she is under the spell of an extra economical phase.

The Brunellese still await the day when Signor Nini not only settles upon a bride, but secures and marries her. So far his excursions into the land of love have only provided merriment for the town. His first venture was a proposal of marriage to a young and charming schoolmistress. As he was too shy to propose to her in person (she had no relations in Brunella) he wrote a very long letter in which he compared her to a carnation, and his own ardent affections to the rays of the sun, which were

to smile upon the happy flower. It was a composition which had required much thought, but had received no help from the Signora Bianca. It was arranged that, if his suit were accepted, the Signorina was to wear the rose he should send her by a friend. The rose was worn next Sunday at Vespers, and Signor Nini, for nearly a year, went happily through the routine of conventional courtship. The little schoolmistress was sincerely attached to her betrothed, and one day she consented to walk out with him unaccompanied by a duenna, which was the subject of much comment by the watchful neighbours. Very sedately they walked along the high road; the story goes that the girl was simple enough to return her lover's caress, which so shocked him that he broke off their engagement. After all he was only exaggerating the feeling of his countrymen, who, while they admire a certain amount of decorous sprightliness on the part of their *innamorata*, cling rigorously to the conventions. Even among the peasants the lover in his letters addresses his beloved as *idolo mio*, but the girl replies: *caro Beppe*.

The Italians have typified the way of courtship—old as the world—in their country dances. In the Piemontese *Monferrina*, the Roman *Saltarello*, the Neapolitan *Tarantella*, and the *Pizzica Pizzica* of the far south, the man is ever the pursuer, the woman the laughing coquette, drawing him on in the circle of quick dance, giving him hope as for a

moment she springs after him, then away again she goes in the maddening whirl.

Signor Nini next paid his attentions to the daughter of the postmaster, a stout young girl, with fuzzy fair hair and possessed of only one eye. But she had learnt the wisdom which the little schoolmistress lacked, and half Brunella was dying of love for her. She played the game with such art, and so charmed the critical *jeunesse dorée* of the town, that each one thought he was the favoured one. Consternation, therefore, fell upon them when one day a young chemist from Carrara, jauntily attired in a check suit, appeared to claim her hand, but she still continued to smile at her admirers through the pigeon-hole of the post-office. Presently mediæval feud began to brood over the town. The chemist from Carrara had to barricade himself in a cousin's house, as the brothers of the girl he had betrayed arrived, armed with pistols and stilettos, to take vengeance and retrieve the honour of their family. Signor Gino and the rest of the discarded swains sat at their windows watching events ; a tremor of excitement even found its way up the castle hill. A day or two later, returning after a long excursion, we reached sleeping Brunella at midnight, and just as we entered the town a man vaulted on to the box and whispered mysteriously into Dandolo's ears. The one-eyed girl had that moment eloped, and was making for a distant and half-ruined castle which belonged to the bridegroom ; the marriage ceremony would be performed later on. When you

think a storm has reached its height, and a thrilling *dénouement* is at hand, a calm suddenly falls upon the land, and people continue the even tenour of their ways. The gay chemist has now set up a shop in Brunella: he sits at ease by his doorway, smoking a large cigar, reading the news and chatting with his neighbours; business seems to prosper, and his peace of mind to be undisturbed. His Signora has returned to her work at the post-office, but she no longer smiles through the pigeon-hole.

In the meantime Signor Nini looked about for consolation, and fixed his affections upon the beautiful Angiolina, who, before she came to us, used to sit all day at her window sewing at starvation wages for the Brunellese. Knowing that she did not care for him, Signor Nini brought all his battery to bear upon so fair a citadel. Many and long were the letters he addressed to her, and every night he and his friends serenaded up and down the street in front of her window, with flute, guitar and song. Signor Nini could not sing or play, but he held the torches, and chose the songs which were always full of hope. And in the end he conquered.

As Angiolina's only fortune is her face, the Signora Bianca was very irate, and soon put an end to the serenades. One day Angiolina received a letter written in Signor Nini's most exquisite and pathetic style, representing to the family the dilemma in which he found himself. He repeated his assurances of utter devotion and faithfulness, but hastened to add

that until he had made a surer position for himself it would be wiser to wait; he graciously suggested that she should keep his letters, thus signifying that there was always a gleam of hope for his beloved. But Angiolina, who is proud as she is poor, tied the letters up into a neat little bundle with blue ribbon, and returned them to Signor Nini, who, in all probability, keeps them for the next occasion, for they are letters which could not be written in a hurry.

Not long afterwards this persevering lover cast his heart at the feet of the niece of our Parish priest, but he did not make the formal demand for her hand in a becoming manner, obviously exposing his feeling that, as the girl had not beauty or much charm, she was expected to provide a dowry.

"I have not a cow to sell, but a niece to marry," said the *Prevosto*, and showed the trembling tailor to the door.

Signor Nini is somewhat crestfallen these days. I hear of him gazing with pathetic admiration at the dark and handsome daughter of Ulisse; by some the courtship is regarded as seriously, as four evenings running he has been to call upon the family; but the serenading, letter and flower periods have not as yet been reached. Indeed, Signor Nini is a little uncertain whether he could cope with anyone so solid-looking as the placid but determined Gemma. He has been heard to remark that his happiness would be complete were he to

find a pleasing girl of about thirteen whom he could train to follow in the way he fancied her to walk, and who would not be likely to develop any masterful qualities. As far as I have been able to observe, even the girls of thirteen look more than a match for Signor Nini.

XIII

A MARRIAGE

*Tre cose belle in questo mondo : prete parato, cavaliere armato,
donna ornata*

ANGIOLINA is the sister of our servants and the recognised beauty of the family. Her features are regular, her complexion dark but clear, her black hair falls in thick waves across her forehead, and her brown eyes look at you from beneath her level brows with something of the expression of a gazelle's. In kindly raillery her family call her the princess, as, while they are content to eat their food anyhow and anywhere, the more conventional Angiolina insists upon owning one particular spot of the kitchen table and lays a neat tablecloth for herself. But contrasting her neat ways and ethereal smile with her tastes in cookery, we have sometimes experienced a shock. Since Mariannina has, out of deference to our English taste, refrained from the use of garlic, Angiolina now declares that her cooking powers have sadly deteriorated, and insists upon a savoury mess for herself, consisting of *polenta* smothered in oil, vinegar, and flavourings of sliced garlic, onions, and a particular kind of cheese which tastes like a bad smell.

Her dream in life had been to become a school-



STREET SCENE

mistress ; certainly her vernacular is purer than the rest of the family ; she writes a good hand, and as a child always knew her lessons. But her occupation in life was suddenly settled by her father, who one day returned home with a sewing machine under his arm and told her to start making her livelihood. In floods of tears the gentle Angiolina learnt to cut out men's shirts, and sat all day and far into the night turning them out at the sweating rate of three-pence apiece, cottons and buttons found by their shop employer. Adelina joined her as soon as she was old enough, and by never raising their eyes from their work were able to make four shirts each a day. At last the day dawned when Angiolina discovered that she could make blouses, and soon the shirt business was exchanged for dressmaking. The first time I ordered a dress she trembled so much that she told me her needle kept tumbling out of her fingers. But after a little practice she developed into an excellent dressmaker. As she has never seen anything of "fashions," except those of Carrara and Brunella, her success is the more remarkable. The pride she inspires among her sisters is delightful. When I am trying on a new dress they both rush round me, throw their hands up in rapture, and exclaim : "*Oh ! Signora*, it fits you like a fashion plate—it looks as if it had been painted on you ; isn't she quite wonderful, our Angiolina ? *Signora*, you will walk out in that dress in Brunella, won't you, to please us ? The Brunellese will die of rage."

It appears that the Brunellese rank and fashion send to neighbouring towns to have their clothes made, and when a dress comes back exceedingly ill-fitting it is admired all the same, because they are able to tell their less prosperous friends that it has come from Florence, or further afield, as the case may be. But lately Angiolina's star has risen, and, although she is a "foreigner," customers flock to her.

Many have been the requests for her hand, one of which has been related in the previous pages. Just before we arrived in Brunella, as she had given up the idea of marrying the prosperous tailor, her heart had been entirely won by a tall and coarse-looking railway porter, whom it was the fashion in Brunella to admire. We never liked his face, and his manners were overbearing and surly. The social distinctions are always difficult to fathom, and we could never understand why Oreste's mother should have objected to his marriage with Angiolina, but it was evident that the railway porter regarded himself as part of the *bourgeoisie*. Certainly the objection was not entirely because of the need of a *dote*. As we have so often witnessed, the mother in the end carried her point, and the marriage was broken off. For a week my work at the castle was at a standstill—Angiolina had retired to bed with a broken heart. Then she arose and returned to her seat in the big window balcony to stitch away with incessant industry, and unruffled brow. Only once, when she caught sight of Oreste coming up the

hill with a telegram, did I see her startled out of her self-control. One scene and then the episode closed for ever. Oreste, who was still much in love with Angiolina, one day stopped to say a word with her in the street, which did not escape the lynx eyes of his mother, and when she knew her burly son to be safely in bed, she took a big stick and gave him a sound thrashing.

The news of the broken engagement travelled to Carrara, and made a young man in a druggist's shop exceedingly happy. He immediately hazarded a picture post-card to Angiolina, who, after a decorous delay, sent him a view of Brunella, which he interpreted as "you may come and try." One Sunday afternoon he was brought by Angiolina, accompanied by her mother, and introduced as the *promesso sposo*. Notwithstanding his twenty-two years, Umberto looks little more than a boy; his ruddy complexion shines as if he washed in icy water and scrubbed his cheeks with Monkey Brand, and his fair hair and stoutness further gives him the appearance of a prosperous young German. The family were all pleased at the marriage—the parents because he had a good situation, Mariannina because he was such a *buon giovane*, and Adelina because he dressed "just like a *Signore*."

Umberto told me that his dream was to set up a little shop, but so far he had not been able to save much out of his £3 a month, out of which he had to pay for lodging and food. He is a peace-loving person, and complained of the exciting life at

Carrara. I said that I had found it a peaceful spot, where the whole population seemed to be quietly sitting in the innumerable *caff  s* playing at cards and buying lottery tickets.

"Then," said Umberto, "you have evidently never seen it on a Saturday, when the marble workers have been paid and they drink the best vintages to make up for the dog's life they have led up in the quarries all the week. There are always rows, and they all seem to happen in my *Padrone's* shop"; and Umberto looked personally aggrieved. "A man would be quietly drinking, and another man would rush in and stab him without a moment's warning, just because there had been some rivalry over their work. Sometimes it was because of a woman. I always had to keep a big heap of sawdust handy to sop up the floor."

"Sawdust is sometimes needed in Brunella," I remarked.

"Not in the same way; and, besides, it is my own *paese*."

Angiolina's courting was of a very mild order. All the fire of her heart had been wasted upon the burly porter, and she only married Umberto because he was good and she had reached what Adelina terms the advanced age of twenty-five. To give Umberto a chance of seeing her I used to let him pass an hour or so at the castle whenever he had a holiday, but she remained all the time with her eyes glued to her needle-work, while he sat at the extreme end of the room cleaning copper pots for

Mariannina with tremendous energy, and occasionally stealing a glance at his beloved. Italian couples are not allowed the easy freedom of English lovers, and Angiolina's reputation would have been wrecked had she walked out with him alone. A strong escort of sisters or friends never left their side, whenever they solemnly promenaded up and down our drive, which goes by the name of the *passeggiata degli amanti*. I remember Mariannina's look of incredulous amazement when I gave orders that no one was to disturb a young engaged couple who were having a little peaceful conversation in the *Sala*. "What!" she said, "you have really left them quite, quite alone? *Che bella cosa!* Englishmen must have cold blood. Perhaps it is the want of sun. Our men are shamelessly forward, unless we set a hedge up around us." She had been puzzled and at first greatly shocked by the young men and women in England, who sat about on benches of a Sunday afternoon, or picnicked together in the fields.

After a few months' engagement the date of Angiolina's marriage was fixed for the first of the year, which they hoped would bring them luck. Like most Italian girls, she had begun making her trousseau and embroidering pillow-cases and sheets with her initials, garlanded with flowers, since she was quite a child, and a goodly store of household linen was ready.

On the New Year we had just had our annual snowstorm, and everywhere was a deep slush, but

no one thought of such details as they fluttered round the bride and put the last bit of blossom in her bridal veil. The dress of pale blue cashmere trimmed with lace and blue braid was a great success and beautifully made. The bride's last touch to her attire was to pull down her new rose-coloured vest, so that it showed through her lace at her wrist; the effect was carefully thought out and certainly original.

Although the road to the church was in a dreadful state, Angiolina firmly declined a carriage. They all felt that even the sacrifice of the gown (and never had such a gown been seen in Brunella) was worth the triumph of being seen by all the neighbours. It is customary in Italy for the bride to be given away by a friend of the family, who is called the *cavaliere*, and in this case the post of honour had been given to my husband. It is also unusual for unmarried girls to attend a wedding; but the Brunellese are very emancipated and modern, and so we found the church filled with all Angiolina's girl friends and all her rivals. We were given chairs within the altar rails: first came our small boy with his nurse behind him, then Umberto with Angiolina on his right, and then the *cavaliere* and myself. The whole proceeding was a little casual, the actual service amazing. From the choir arose raucous sounds, varied by Giovanni's own rendering of a tenor part to the Mass, the evil imp himself, blue-eyed and cherub face complete, peeping first on one side and then on the other. A crowd of

other wretched, bedraggled, shivering little devils scrambled about on either side of the altar; or sometimes they leant against it, facing the congregation, or else whispered and played tricks with the boys on the other side of the rails, until the priest had to stop at the most solemn part of the Mass and curse them. It was such a babble of confusion and braying of wild beasts that I could not believe we were not all savages and the ceremony some prehistoric piece of worship, till I looked at Angiolina by the side of the *cavaliere*, placid and beautiful, and then at Mariannina beyond, who had an exalted expression on her face like an Italian Madonna. The small son stood on his chair and never moved during the whole hour, so lost in wonder was he, like an angel trying to remember if it had not all been different, and gazing at the large wax *Gesù Bambino* in the glass case sparkling with innumerable candles. The rings were blessed and asperged; but Umberto fumbled so long with it that Angiolina calmly took it out of his hand and put it on her finger herself. The *cavaliere* whispered a remonstrance, but she replied: "What difference can it make, *sarà lo stesso*."

Amid a perfect tumult of discordant sounds the priest mumbled a few hurried words and an acolyte passed round the plate. It was afterwards much commented upon in the town that directly he saw a five-franc piece and a note in the plate he thought of nothing else until it was safely deposited upon the altar—certainly he forgot to bless the congrega-

tion. As Yorick would say: "Just Heaven! what thoughts does the word and the significance they should attach to it, and the manner in which in reality they use it, call up before the mind?"

Mass over, the *cavaliere* led the bride down the aisle and through the town to the municipality, feeling, he said, very much as if he had committed bigamy. The family had insisted upon this arrangement, as he was taller than Umberto and would "cut a better figure" with Angiolina.

The crowd of boys clamouring for the wedding sweets had again to be faced. It was a wild fight and scramble—some even dived into our pockets, and an old man and woman, who joined in the scrimmage, were bowled over in the slush by the pack of boys.

At the municipality things were quieter and more business-like. While we stood round the table the Syndic appeared, a clerk tied a red sash round his middle, and the ceremony began. Here, though he went a good pace, his words were intelligible, and there was at least an acknowledgment of the duty of mutual help and support.

Among the people there still survives a good deal of the old-fashioned etiquette which I often feel strikes a curious note in Italian life, where so much is of a somewhat casual character. For instance, it is not customary for the bride's mother to be present at the marriage ceremony, and anyone

gives the bride away, not necessarily the father. When the time comes for the bride to go to her new home, her family keep well in the background, and only after three days takes place an interchange of supper parties with cards between the two families. The bride is escorted to her new home, not by her husband, but by the elder brother; and in some villages near here (Brunella is too advanced and despises ancient customs) she finds the door closed against her, and even barricaded with branches of thorny acacia and brambles. The family drop a ladder from out of a top window, by which she is laughingly invited to climb into the house, but as the ladder is never allowed to reach the ground the poor bride feels rather like a buffoon. When a family takes advantage of this old custom to show their ill-will at the marriage, it no longer becomes an amusing farce. A girl I know, daughter of a station-master, was kept out of the house in the pouring rain for an hour. Finally the brother-in-law, her *cavaliere*, bursts open the door and the party enters, the bride going round to each of the men of the family to present a shirt she has made for them. Perhaps this is to show what a good housewife, or *massaia*, she is, just as in the Val d'Arno the peasant bride is the first to hurry down to the kitchen in the morning to light the fire and do the household work.

The mother-in-law presents her with a handful of rice, and in some parts of Italy with a black hen, both symbols of fruitfulness. This custom, which is

only to be met with among the hills, and even there is dying out, would hardly be worth recording if it did not symbolise a great feature in Italian life—the omnipotence of the mother as head of the household. The new daughter-in-law has to gain her entrance with difficulty and through the intervention of one of the family, the *madre* in this strange manner reminding the bride of her supremacy.

Again, at a christening I have noticed a rigid observance of formality. Even when the baby is christened, at the age of a few weeks instead of days, the mother is not present, pretending still to be abed. In the same way, at the luncheon given afterwards, the god-mother sits at the head of the table, opposite to the father, even if his wife is well enough to be present. The peasants and artisans seldom stay in bed longer than two or three days, and immediately return to dig in the fields and wash the household linen — standing bare-footed in the frigid mountain streams and rivers.

During the mother's confinement the generosity of the people shows itself. All her neighbours bring baskets of provisions and bottled wine, and carry them into the bedroom on their heads, just as Ghirlandaio's woman of the flowing drapery does when she comes to visit St. Anne in the fresco of Sta Maria Novella. It is the same basket, too, and the slender-necked flask of wine. The person who fares least well on these occasions is the poor baby, who, for the first twenty-four hours, is only given

a piece of sugar, wrapped up in a piece of linen, to suck.

This is about the only time that the Italian mother does something the child does not like, because she thinks its health will benefit, the first milk not being considered salutary.

For the rest the child is rarely made to do anything distasteful : milk it dislikes, wine is given instead, even if barely ten months old, and if it wants a raw piece of sausage or ham, "Well, why not?" says the mother, "the *piccina* likes it, and cries so, if I refuse."

XIV

EMIGRANTS FROM BRUNELLA

*E vai che Dio ti dia la buon' andata,
E la tornata sia dolce allegrezza.*

(Popular Song)

I BELIEVE that Italians are now beginning to see that emigration is not an unmitigated evil. Where population increases at the amazing rate as in Italy, and where, as yet, home industries cannot cope with the poverty of the land, it seems a sensible thing that some members of a family should seek their fortune and adventure abroad. For instance, a small peasant proprietor, who has a precarious income coming in from his farm of about eighty pounds a year, finds it very difficult to provide for his family of three or four sons and as many daughters; the situation becomes still more complicated when the sons marry and bring their wives to live in the paternal home. Two sons stay to work the land, one perhaps becomes a stone-mason or a worker in marble, while the most enterprising goes off to North or South America.

The desire for unknown wealth is spreading. In the backwaters of small Italian towns people at last are realising their poverty and the intense dis-

comfort of their lives. This may mean the first rung in the ladder of ultimate prosperity. The United States and the Argentine Republic have become for Italians the promised land, where gold is to be picked up in the streets. If there were not a certain amount of fairy-like conception about the distant country and if the people realised fully the arduous toil and often great suffering entailed in the search for even a moderate fortune, few would be found to cross the ocean. Everyone knows the fuss an Italian makes when going a journey. I have seen two men embrace and bid each other an earnest farewell when the traveller was only going to join his regiment at a town two hours up the line. Here in Brunella our friends come to see us off at the station, when we are only going to shop for the afternoon at a neighbouring town, and there is much waving of hands and many a "*buon viaggio*;" and if we happen to miss the first train back, faithful Paolo is waiting anxiously at the station.

"I know all the world," says the pedlar who has journeyed through Italy. "He has travelled much," says a villager of a neighbour who has perhaps crossed over to France in search of work.

It is either dire necessity, or a desire to be a little better off and own a little land, which drives the Italian so far away from his beloved corner of Italy, to which, with few exceptions, he returns as fast as he can.

In North America, although many go out there

and return prosperous, the Italian has not become an important part of the country. There is the great difficulty of the language, especially for the uneducated; and, pitted against the Northerner, he has a far harder fight for a livelihood. But in South America he easily acquires Spanish, and finds himself among a people with whom he shares many characteristics. But there is one great difference between them—the Italian comes determined to work, and he cares not what menial task he performs so that ultimately he attains to affluence; while the Spaniard despises such labour and allows the opportunities of commerce and agriculture to slip away from him without regret. Often a ragged Italian boy, shipped off to South America by poverty-stricken parents to join an uncle or friend, after a plucky fight, and a try at every trade, ends by becoming a prosperous owner of mills, a great wine merchant or contractor. As Mr Okey tells us in his chapter on Emigration, the Argentine wheat king had half a franc in his pocket when he landed.

There is indeed something of mediæval romance in this Greater Italy, and the extraordinary ups and downs of fortune are brought before our notice almost daily here in small Brunella. Even high above us in the Apennines, where you might fancy the name of America to be a myth, the sturdy lad of fourteen who trudges by your mule, tells how next month he is to start on a solitary journey to join his elder brother at Buenos Ayres. His

father is dead ; his mother keeps on the little farm up there among the beech trees in a brave struggle to bring up the rest of her young family. The boy's eyes sparkle as he thinks of the great world beyond the seas ; like many another Italian lad of to-day he has grown weary of the mountains, of the everlasting tinkle of the cow-bells, and of wandering up and down the rocky gorges, following the mules with their loads of charcoal for the plain. But as the years pass he will remember his home in the Apennines, and return to buy a little plot of land or a small beech copse, and become a farmer or a charcoal-burner on his own account.

On arrival the emigrants seem to plunge into any trade that happens to offer a means of livelihood. There is something comic in the cheerful way in which a man, who at home has been a carpenter, in America becomes a dustman ; a chemist is engaged as a waiter, and a stone-mason for a time is content to turn pedlar. An emigrant priest I heard of set up as a barber, and is now a banker. Garibaldi, before his Italian campaign, during those intervals of peace so wearisome to him, toured through the towns of Brazil as a candle-merchant, and we may be sure he often gave his wares away without payment.

When enough money is put aside, earned from these various occupations, the Italian emigrant can pause to look about for a good position in his own craft ; but it sometimes happens that the mason never touches mortar again, the carpenter

forgets how to saw, and the chemist would probably poison you, if he tried to mix a drug. Instead, they sink their small capital into some business and ultimately become prosperous contractors, hotel-keepers, or wine-merchants. The endless variety in their lives and the vagueness of their prospects at the outset must appeal to every lover of romantic adventure.

Of course there are the unfortunate ones of this earth who never would prosper anywhere, and we have a few such specimens in Brunella. Our friend Signora Marianna is not a believer in emigration, and laughingly points out to us the penniless home-comers, and indignantly she asks why people should want to leave their good native air for those heathenish countries over the waters. I mildly point out the advantage of prosperity, and how these people are able to send money to their poor relations. But the Signora Marianna will have no good come out of leaving Italy. "Our grandfathers were content to stay at home," she says, "and all I can say is that, when a couple starts off to embark at Genoa, they carry with them a big bag of goods, and they return home with a small bag and a load of children."

An unfortunate case was a ne'er-do-weel Brunellese, who, after loafing about the town, pretending to work, went off to America with the last five hundred francs of his wife's dowry, and for fifteen years gave his family no sign of life. When she had started her children in life, she spent most of



THE EMIGRANT'S WIFE

her day in church, praying that her husband might never return. But the other day, to the consternation of his wife, he turned up, the Italian Consul in New York, who objects to indigent Italians roaming the streets, having given him a free ticket to Naples. His welcome home was witnessed by the Brunellese, who hung out of their windows and stood in groups on their doorsteps to enjoy the sight of a crestfallen husband begging admittance to his home. To the intense delight of the spectators, before admitting him, his daughter delivered him a long lecture upon his past misdeeds and present poverty; his wife then took up the discourse, ending with a final reproof: "I am ashamed of you. All these years you have only worked enough to get bread and your bottle of wine; now you are sent back like a beggar," adding in an aggrieved tone, "and you have not even come back with both your eyes." She drew her shawl over her face, as she stepped back into the shadow of the doorway and the man slouched up the staircase. He might never earn a welcome in the house, but he knew that they would never deny him a share of their last crust.

But these are exceptional cases, and notwithstanding Signora Marianna's arguments to the contrary, I cannot help seeing the prosperous results of emigration. How the shopkeeper with no particular vocation, returns with a small fortune remains a mystery to me as well as the rest of the town, who laughingly say, "So-and-so must have stolen out

there, for certainly he had no' brains to make any money with."

For instance, there is a family here which owns property in New York, but were obliged to return to Italy because the husband was in bad health. Both are illiterate. The wife comes to me to have her business letters read aloud, and sometimes I write a reply to "Mr Green of New York," for which services the good woman insists upon bringing me offerings of eggs, and once she gave me an oleograph on linen of a pink-cheeked brunette with a rose at her ear, which she suggested we could use as an antimacassar. Her Italian is a patois; her English almost incomprehensible; but she knew enough to criticise my accent, which she said she supposed was "British." I went to see them one day and came away depressed by the sight of their apparent poverty and inefficiency to cope with the ordinary details of life. Their living room, kitchen and sitting-room in one, boasted one table, a wooden bench by the empty hearth, and a few broken-down chairs. The place was not over clean, and the cartload of children were pitiable, little, unkempt objects, some playing in the street, others sitting on the doorstep, and the rest making themselves a general nuisance in the room. My astonishment can be imagined when, the other day, I learnt that they had bought a house in Brunella for the sum of eight hundred pounds, and it afterwards transpired that they drew a sum of about two hundred and fifty pounds a year from their property in New

York. Their final success was due to an eating-shop and bar; but that such ill-educated and slovenly people should have succeeded in North America, or indeed anywhere, seems strange and hardly fair. Not better educated but full of natural ability is our local grocer, who set up his shop on the proceeds of his gains in America. At the age of twenty he fell in love with a girl living in the next town whose parents had entertained a higher ambition; but one night she dropped out of the window into his arms, and away they fled to New York. After that their history became a blank to even their intimate friends, until they returned a year ago, still quite young, very stout and very prosperous. They now sell Bologna sausage by the ton to all the countryside, and in the intervals drive out in a smart *baroccino* with a fast and high-stepping horse.

"Why do you not keep a carriage?" they ask us as they meet us trudging along the dusty roads; "it is very convenient, and one gets over the ground so fast."

And this prosperous grocer is not the only emigrant who has brought something of American restlessness into a quiet Italian town. Often a long absence makes the Italian critical of his native country, and uneasy among his old surroundings. This is especially the case among the younger generation, who on a visit to their parents soon weary for the land of their adoption. "Out there one lives, *c'è vita*," and so they return to the endless

quest of fortune. In the train going up to the Bagni di Lucca one autumn, we came across an Italian family who were on their way home after some fifteen years spent in North America. They were well to do, if one could judge by the man's gold watch and immaculate black cloth clothes, and the woman's blouse of brocaded silk and marvellous garden erection for a hat. They were both genuinely overcome at sight of the familiar hills, and the wife began to draw a picture what perfect felicity it would be to her to live in a little house among the chestnut woods with a vineyard, a field, and a cow. Her handsome son and daughter, talking like pure-blooded Americans, and looking unmistakably Italian, crushed the idyl with all the severity of young people in their teens. They told her that, if that was her ideal, it certainly was not theirs, and that they would not come to see her, if she stuck herself down in a slow, little place in the mountains, where there were no trams and the railway was ever so far away. They proceeded to criticise everything around them, and to compare most unfavourably the backward customs of Italy to the modern delights of New York. It was amusing to watch the shocked expressions of these young puritans, because some peasants happened to be seeing to their vines on a Sunday, and the country had not put on a funereal garb. The mother looked frankly puzzled by her children, whose minds moved in a different sphere to her own; the father sat gazing out of the window at the Lucchese landscape.

One friend of ours, owner of a brick kiln which had failed, went off to America, leaving his very beautiful wife behind with their young children. He used to travel all over South Carolina, picking up Chippendale furniture for sale in New York, and finally returned with enough money to buy land and settle down peacefully at the age of forty. On a hillside below a mediæval castle he bought a great vineyard, and in the plain he planted a fruit orchard which he surrounded with a wall built with the bricks of his old kiln, and adorned it with the unsold terra-cotta vases. It was the first walled orchard we had ever seen in Italy, and the impression of something strange was augmented as we walked one spring evening with Signor Marco among his maze of flowering pear trees, and listened to his enthusiastic talk about Chippendale furniture. His Italian talk was quick and vivacious; but when he spoke in English he delivered a sort of oration in a slow drawl.

He filled baskets full of apples for us, gave us gooseberry bushes, and thrust upon our acceptance a terra-cotta vase we had admired. His wife stood among the trees watching us, her small head swathed in a yellow handkerchief, a full skirt gathered about her slender waist. A host of young children played about her feet, and she kept handing them chestnuts, which they never ceased from stuffing into their mouths. There is a romantic story connected with this beautiful creature while her husband was in America, but he either does not

know or ignores idle rumour, and continues to adore her and deck her out with earrings and silk shawls, so that when she goes to church on a *festa* she walks among her admiring women folk like a young queen.

The last emigrant we have watched depart from his native Brunella was Umberto, the bridegroom of a few months ago. The day after his marriage with the beautiful Angiolina he received the news that his master was closing his shop, and, after six years, dispensed with his services. We all suspected that he preferred an unmarried assistant. After living on his wife's people and hearing of no situation, the poor man became desperate, especially as the Brunellese in chorus satirised his position. At last he decided to seek for work in Buenos Ayres, where he had a well-to-do uncle. This all sounded practical, until we heard that the uncle had not written to any of his relations for twenty-six years. Like the rest, he had gone away absolutely penniless, and is now a big contractor, owning considerable property. When he began to make his fortune he sent for his wife, but she refused to leave her native village, which is a few miles from Brunella, and possibly they may never meet again, as her husband declares that he is far too busy to come over and see her. He sends her money and very rarely writes. An Italian is not a frequent correspondent, but when he does write it is a perfect document. News of the absent is brought by chance arrivals from America, some who come to see their family or to

take back a bride and show their friends what fine fellows they have blossomed into.

After little more than a month of married life, Umberto departed, the chorus now declaring that he was a heartless husband, and a very silly one to boot, for a woman during the first year was in her prime, afterwards—well, she was not worth so much, except as a housekeeper. So Umberto started with a small bag of clothes, neatly mended and packed by the careful Angiolina, a new hat, an Inverness-cape much admired by the family, and a large Bologna sausage; beyond his ticket his sole fortune consisted of a twenty-franc gold bit, which dangled at his watch chain. At the start he was full of hope, but the father of one of his fellow-travellers afterwards described to us how both young men lost all their nonchalance and jocularly when they saw the steamer at Genoa, and hung round his neck weeping copious tears.

For many a day at the Fortezza we waded in tears, for all the maids, joined by their mother, lifted up their hands and voices at the thought of Umberto braving the perils of the deep. We spent hours poring over maps which conveyed absolutely nothing to their distracted minds. Finally we all solemnly undertook to walk up to the mountain sanctuary of the Madonna of la Quercione, a pilgrimage which is always made when one of a family goes on a long journey. The bride, who is not famous as a mountain climber, remained at home to pray, but she was careful to give us the franc to

pay the priest for the unveiling of the miraculous picture, impressing upon us that we were to see that the priest lit all the necessary candles. "Sometimes they economise," said Angiolina.

Our pilgrimage, however efficacious to Umberto, did not bring peace to our household. We were perpetually being agitated by news of disaster, and I had plenty of occupation trying to make them realise, each one in turn, that a shipwreck in the North Sea could not possibly affect Umberto, who was sailing in the Atlantic. Every rumour of ill-tidings was hastily brought up to Angiolina by her girl friends, who seemed to gloat over a possible excitement, however painful.

With the extraordinary casualness of Italians, Umberto merely sent word of his safe arrival by a friend returning by the next boat, who, for a day or two, quite forgot to deliver the message. But after about two months, letters began to pour in upon us all. This is the letter he wrote to me. I had asked him to relate everything about his journey, and to avoid the innumerable polite speeches which usually occupy most of an Italian letter, and so obtained an epistle very much to the point.

"ILLUSTRISSIMA E GENTILISSIMA SIGNORA,—

"Here at last is my letter relating to you all that befell me on the journey. We embarked at Genoa, where the snow was half a metre high and the wind blew us off our feet. After we had been

going five hours, Ferrarini said to me: 'The ship seems to jump too much; let me see if it is the sea which makes it dance so.' And opening the little round window, we saw great mountains of water, so we hastily shut it. Presently, when we were in bed, behold, the window flew open and a canal of water rushed in and inundated us, our bed, and our clothes—in short, it was a great disaster. But after two bad days in the Gulf of Lyons the sea grew calm and every one came out of their holes and began to appear on deck wrapped up in rugs, looking like so many corpses after being two days without food—in fact it was like the garden of a hospital, when the invalids go out to take the air. The bell for coffee sounded at eight; I did my best to gulp it down, but it was salt and tasted of acorns. At twelve they gave us soup, potatoes and anchovies; I ate the anchovies as best I could, but the soup I could not touch. Everything was very dirty, and we had to eat standing, like the beasts. After six days of this, I borrowed twenty francs from a friend and arranged with the cook of the second class to give me something extra at midday and at supper, if I paid him a franc a day. He agreed, and after that I had the appetite of four people. The time passed very quickly. On the ship there were more things than in the whole of Brunella. Nothing was wanting—and I had expected to find so many terrors on the sea, whereas, when the sea is calm, one is better than on land, except for the great heat on board, owing to the crowd of people. In thirty

days, from the 14th of February to March the 16th, when we arrived, I seemed to have passed through the four seasons of the year. Some of us played at cards or at *tombola*; others sang and played the guitar and flute—in short, it was like a town, and we did not seem to be on the sea. But now to speak of those who died on board. During the journey some eight people died, but all old people: one must be fit and young to make this journey. Then there were many fights on board between the Neapolitans and Calabrese.

“We stopped first at Las Palmas, where we stayed two days to take in coal, and we were nearly suffocated by the heat and the coal dust. When we left, I asked permission of the *Commissario Regio* to have a bath, and this was immediately granted me, and after this I felt myself to be a new man and much refreshed. Hardly were we in sight of Montevideo than some twenty steamers came to meet us with people on board who expected their relations and friends. At Buenos Ayres all our friends were waiting on the pier and waving their hats and handkerchiefs. The first to disembark were the first- and second-class passengers, and, after three hours' delay, our turn came. Directly we arrived, we left our bags at the emigration office, and went off in a carriage and pair, as it is not the fashion here to drive with one horse. We went to Gerri's hotel. Directly he saw us, he ran out and embraced us, pulled out a bundle of notes, and paid our carriage, which was six and a half francs, and brought us in.

Here we ate and drank well and paid for nothing. Other friends came, who had seen of our arrival in the papers, and embraced us warmly. From the moment we arrived we drove about day and night with our friends in a landau and pair, and had our meals at a big hotel. In these two days about two hundred francs were spent, and Perri and Gerri paid for everything. I put my hand in my pocket to pay my share, but the others would not hear of it."

As I came to this point in the letter, Umberto's wife and her sisters were half laughing, half crying, for they knew that the pocket referred to was quite empty: *Il nostro povero, caro Umberto*.

"Indeed," continued the letter, "I do not know how to describe the way the money falls from them—like the leaves in autumn. When I left Buenos Ayres one of my friends told me that, if I did not get on with my uncle, he would lend me the money for my return journey to Buenos Ayres, and that work could always be found for me. Indeed there is enough to do here for as many as like to come over and find it. My uncle met me at the station and paid me a whole heap of compliments. I followed him to a beautiful *baroccino* with a fine horse with white harness, and we drove to his house. I asked, with my eyes wide open, if the carriage and horse were his, and he answered, 'Yes.' Now I will tell you how my uncle lives. First you must know that my uncle is the best of men and the most respected in the place—when we drive out every one takes off his hat to him. My uncle is very charitable, and

has set many people up in business ; the poor who come to him here are never turned away and do not receive less than forty centimes a-piece. He has three houses all let, and we live in a fourth which is not quite finished. Eggs are not wanting, as there are about four hundred hens, which the whole of Brunella has not got. For the moment I do not yet know what to say about my work ; at present I play the gentleman, driving about in a *baroccino*, and go out hunting. Here the hares come into the house, and one kills as many as are wanted.

“ My uncle has promised to pay my ticket here and is sending it by the boat ; and at the end of April Angiolina shall have my month's wages.

“ With many greetings to you, *Gentilissima Signora*, and to the *Signore suo Sposo*, and begging of you to greet my Angiolina, and also her family, I sign myself respectfully, Yours, UMBERTO M. . . .”

It was illustrative of the distrust of Italians among themselves that, while the uncle declared to Umberto that he had sent the money, he only commissioned a friend returning to Brunella to spy out the land, to discover whether Umberto was really married, and whether he really had borrowed the money for his journey. Umberto's prospects did not continue as bright as they at first had promised. The partnership with the charitable uncle did not last long, and a hard struggle began for Umberto, who, easy-going and phlegmatic, had never realised the necessity of real hard work before success could be attained. But now that his former dreams of an almost

instantaneous success have faded away, he is resigned and discreetly happy, and the hope of being able in a few years to put aside some forty pounds, which is the magic sum he names in all his letters, in order to buy a small shop in Brunella, urges him on to fresh and unaided toil. "*Come è bravo e coraggioso il nostro Umberto.*"

XV

MIGLIANO VILLAGE

Va in Piazza, vedi e odi ; torna a casa, bevi e godi

I STARTED on a stormy spring morning to visit my friend Signorina Lucia, who is the school-mistress of Migliano, a small, poor village in a neighbouring valley, but set somewhat higher up among the Apennines than Brunella. It never struck me to think of inhabitants being critical of visitors until my driver, twisting round on the box with the usual Italian disregard for the horse and its possible freaks, upbraided me for not having told him of our destination at the start.

"*Gesù Maria*," said Guercio, "had I known we were coming to Migliano, I should never have harnessed this carriage, truly the worst in my master's stable ; *Dio mio* ! what will the people say ?" and before we arrived he insisted upon putting down the limp hood, notwithstanding the rain, and did his best to shake the poor carriage into some show of respectability ; another shake and I felt it would come in two. I know few things which bring back so vividly the fun of road-life in Italy as one of these disreputable little gigs and a bow-legged horse which looks ready to drop and yet covers thirty miles in the day at a steady jog-trot. The driver

attributes its endurance to the pheasant feather set jauntily at its ear, and the bells and the crack of the fur-trimmed whip which cast a faded splendour over the bedraggled turn-out. Away you speed from town to town and over the hills; nothing depresses or worries the driver, who turns a radiant face towards every disaster. "*Pazienza, Signori miei*, life is long, we'll get there soon," is the sort of refrain he sings out cheerily. The harness breaks; oh! it is a *piccolezza*, a mere trifle to happen, easily mended with string and a few pins—does the Signora happen to have a pin about her? Something falls in the road; you inquire what it is, and are told—nothing to signify, only half the shaft, and you can get along quite the same without it. And that broad and reassuring smile which he turns upon you, and the business-like way in which he ties up the broken harness with string borrowed from a passer-by, praising his carriage, his horse, and himself all the while, can but fill you with confidence—unless you are of a very distrustful nature. Something did break in the way to Migliano, I forget what, but it set me thinking of many wayside adventures which all ended with a laugh, and also made me sing a pæan to the Italian horse, whose placid disposition and stolid common-sense saves the human race from many disasters.

So we clattered into Migliano, all our bells jingling, whip cracking, and the first thing I saw was a beautiful, broad-chested peasant woman washing herself at a window like a veritable Bathsheba.

The second sight was an over-dressed woman in scarlet with a tinsel butterfly nodding in her black hair, who stood in the road, a child of four clinging to her skirts. I felt it would be my fate to know her.

The Signorina Lucia lodged with a good couple in the village, Angiolini and Clementina. Both welcomed me heartily on the threshold of their shop, a cavernous recess with a vaulted roof and rough columns opening on to the sunny street.

I looked curiously at the immense baskets full of every variety of *maccheroni*, sacks of corn, shelves of wine, cloth, and haberdashery. The ceiling was hung with hams and festooned with sausages. In the intervals of supplying these varied goods to his customers, Signor Angiolini sat at a machine turning out clothes by the dozen.

The order of their day span round as regularly as clockwork. It was dawn the first morning when, between sleeping and waking, I was conscious of a swish of skirts on the brick floor and of a cautious footstep. Then in the dim light I saw Clementina disappearing through the floor with the agility of a harlequin. Presently I heard a turning of keys and creaking of doors, and then appeared the head of the *Padrona di casa* through the floor with a cheery "good morning" to me. This was her daily method of opening the shop. Looking out of the window into a narrow back street and across to the

olive groves and hills opposite, I saw the place awakening. It was extraordinarily still; cow-bells tinkled, children hurried after their herds with merry clatter, and women came down from the fields with loads of fodder on their heads. I heard my friend's bright voice calling to a woman that her load was too heavy, from the window above.

"True, Signora Maestra, but what would you? *Pazienza*."

Pazienza, like a dirge of mournful resignation, rings through all the valleys of Italy.

The busy tailor had already been some time at his sewing-machine, and my friend correcting copy-books, when we met at half-past seven for breakfast. We dipped the excellent home-made bread into large cups of black coffee, and served ourselves with sugar out of a tomato tin. Our *Padroni di casa* might well have afforded a more conventional sugar-basin, but the ordinary little comforts were considered of no importance by them, and my friend, so long as she had books and plenty of them, was perfectly content. At nine o'clock the school bell rang, and we heard a scurrying of feet down the street. A little before midday the *Maestra* and I returned home to find Clementina busily occupied in making the *sugo* for the dish of *maccheroni*. We were sent down to the shop to choose which *pasta* we fancied, the tube-shaped vermicelli or the broad, curly ribbon sort, and it took a long time calculating exactly how much we meant to consume. Angiolini,

judging by his own capacious appetite, weighed out a pound to each person. We quartered his calculation, and hurried back to Clementina, who was standing impatiently by the cauldron of boiling water. While we sat in the *salottino* reading a poem of Carducci, to forget the pangs of hunger, Clementina came in with some of the *maccheroni* in a perforated enamel spoon, for us to judge whether it was cooked enough to please us, and we followed her in, to see her turn it into a titanic dish, and mix it in the good veal gravy she has made, flavoured with everything under the sun.

Angiolini sat before a veritable mountain of *maccheroni*, which I watched with fascinated eye. When he demolished his second helping, I no longer regarded him as mortal man. Then followed two dishes of boiled meat and fried, a third of vegetables and a sweet, the length of the menu being in my honour. The great feature of the repast was a bottle of white wine, of which Angiolini solemnly drew the cork, and an appreciative silence reigned, as we tasted the five-year-old vintage.

Our host was miserable, because my friend and I failed to compete with his appetite. An Italian's idea of hospitality is to stuff his guests like a Christmas capon, and to rebel at his generosity is considered uncivil. We had literally to cover our glasses and take up our plates, threatening instant flight from the house if he continued to press us with more food and wine. At last Cristina inter-

vened, and persuaded him to sit down and resume conversation.

School occupied the afternoon until about three, then we went a walk in the country and read by a mill-stream. Supper was at half-past six, and consisted of hard-boiled eggs, salad, some artichokes and quantities of home-made bread, and fresh mountain cheese. This time we did not have white wine out of the bottle of honour, but red wine equally good out of the *fiasco*, which showed they considered me one of the family.

There is considerable difficulty in getting a variety of eatables ; the butcher only kills once in ten days, and the family depend a great deal on the fresh white cheeses made of cow's milk, and the excellent lettuces which Clementina grows in wooden boxes on their small balcony.

Clementina is one of those cheerful, capable women who could serve you a meal on a desert island. She is a second wife, and popular as both husband and wife were in the place, they had to suffer the usual fate when middle-aged people marry in Italy—all the village turned out at night to serenade them, beating copper pots with tongs, and striking tin saucepan-lids together, a fiendish jest. The first time I witnessed this strange custom in a southern town I thought a revolution was beginning.

Another old custom was observed, when the daughter of Angiolini was jilted by her lover in order to marry a richer girl. It appears that in

such a case the friends of the jilted party often wreak a curious vengeance. One morning the man and his family woke to hear the laughter of passers-by, and looking out of the window saw that all their walls, doors, and hedges had been white-washed, and—greatest insult of all—they found that the tails of their animals had all been dipped in the pail.

What delightful talks we enjoyed these days, as we lingered over our evening meal. "*Buona sera, Sposa,*" Angiolini would say, addressing me, "what do you think I have done to-day? Now let me count," and he holds up a large fat hand, spreading out all the fingers; "I have made a man's shirt, one pair of drawers, one pair of trousers, and a jacket with four pockets—such pockets, too, all admirably exact."

"*Brava!*" we all say in chorus, and he nods at us with a broad smile and settles down to the table tucking a large napkin into his neck, and spreading it carefully over his ample person.

Angiolini is by no means a man you can meet with every day: he has a character very much all his own which is felt in the first encounter. Having been honest yet prosperous all his life in his trade of shopkeeper and tailor combined, he occupies an honoured position in the country-side. His savings he has always invested in vineyards, which give a good return, because he keeps a sharp eye to his interests—*l'occhio del padrone ingrassa i buoi*—and has money to spend on improvements. There is

no need at the age of sixty-five for him to work, but you might as well expect a river to cease flowing as Angiolini to sit idle. I asked him if he would not even take a holiday to come and see us; but he said that he was too closely linked to his shop, and if ever he put the shutters up the people complained that Migliano was a dead place because they could not see him at his door. Often the children crowd about him and watch his wonderful machine, or a villager drops in and takes possession of the three-legged stool.

Angiolini enters into animated conversation, giving his opinion on every subject of the local world; but he continues to peddle away at his machine for dear life, and never raises an eye.

Of an evening when we sat talking round the supper-table, his observation was keen and his criticisms struck to the root of things. Screwing up his twinkling eyes, which seem unusually small in his big round face, and tipping back his chair, his pipe at the corner of his mouth, he would let fall some shrewd remark upon his neighbours and things in general. There is no *politica* about Angiolini—no diplomatic way of approaching a subject, so admired by Italians; he tells many a home truth in a curious sing-song manner, and his way of coining words to suit his purpose gives his talk a certain humour and has gained for him the title of *un originale*.

One evening our conversation happened to turn

upon religion and the priests. Clementina is sister to the parish priest of a neighbouring hill town, and until she married Angiolini, kept house for her brother. Her criticisms were not very favourable, revealing an aimless and empty life if not always an immoral one. She described to me the great feasting which takes place when a priest says his first mass. *Le nozze del prete*, the wedding of the priest, lasts three days: to the first banquet all the near relations, great friends, and *pezzi grossi*, or people who count, are invited; the second day the ordinary acquaintance, or people who count for little; while the third day the doors are flung open, and apparently any one may come in who likes.

My hosts wished to know if our priests married. Angiolini nodded approval, and remarked with his usual directness that were it the case in Italy "*ci sarebbero meno peccati commessi e meno bastardi per il mondo.*"

I tried to give them an idea of the life of a hard-working Roman Catholic priest in England, too busy from morning to night among the schools, and visiting prisons and poor people, to get into mischief.

"It is very wonderful, all this," they said, very politely, but I saw that they had difficulty in believing me. When I happened to ask if the priests in Italy did not give to the poor, that surely it sometimes happened that they had private means or held a living from some old feudal legacy, they laughed at my innocence. "Give—'give' is not in

the dictionary of our priests—take, take, take, yes, that word you will see printed in big letters. Why, they often refuse the full burial service, and for anything they insist on payment first.” “After all,” I said, “they have to live.”

“Did you ever see a lean priest?” said Angiolini, and he told me an amusing story of a country priest who was summoned by his bishop for disobeying the rule that no priest should have a servant under forty years of age. The young priest excused himself, saying he had searched the countryside in vain, and at last had engaged two girls of twenty, which he thought would be the same.

The spirit of severe criticism against the clergy is so widespread in Italy that I do not feel it to be unfair to record these impressions. On the other hand, I have met with two or three hard-working priests; I particularly recall a Benedictine parish priest of a small but famous Umbrian town, who had ceded an ancient title and considerable possessions in the South to a younger brother. He lives a strenuous life among the poor, and I have often met him covered with dust and mud returning from a tramp into the country to look after the farms belonging to the Benedictines. Fogazzaro, in his otherwise dull and interminable novel “*Malombra*,” has given a vivid portrait of a parish priest which is a very delightful record of a real person. No one can help loving Don Innocenzo, who is always getting into trouble with his old servant for giving

everything away to the poor and going about with a disreputable umbrella.

Perhaps the reaction against the priesthood was all the severer at Migliano, as a family of priests own a good deal of the countryside, and have certainly not succeeded in gaining either the respect or affections of the people. Don Filippo and his nephews seem to spend their time scouring the country in *baroccini*, collecting rents, attending fairs, and visiting their numerous relations, who are all doctors, notaries, and schoolmasters and school-mistresses in the neighbourhood.

Don Filippo once got into great trouble by standing as intermediary between a priest, who had won a big sum in a lottery, and an impoverished nobleman, who wished to borrow from the lucky man. Don Filippo knew quite well he was backing a lame horse, and while the priest lost most of his lottery money, Don Filippo went to prison ; but, as there was no one to celebrate mass for his parishioners and hear their confessions, he was allowed to take his term of seclusion in sections, and perform his religious duties in the intervals of liberty.

My hosts were desirous to know something of our "English religion," and, as well as I could, I tried to give them a brief outline of our faith. Their amazement was a comedy.

"What!" they all called out, even Signorina Lucia joining in the chorus, "what is this you tell us? You are baptised, you believe in God, you say

the *Credo*, but, but . . . well, you are not pagans but Christians like ourselves. Who would have imagined such a thing, *sangue della Madonna*! I could not help laughing at their bewildered faces, and then I hastened to explain that we own no allegiance to the Pope, and did not believe in his infallibility. But this difference they waved aside with a "*ma che infallibilità!*"—that was a doctrine of yesterday, a caprice of that good but misguided Pio Nono. It was my turn to be surprised, and still more so when they told me that a feeling was creeping in, even among the more bigoted families, against confession. People now, they declared, expressed ideas which a few years ago they hardly dared to think. Warming to my subject, and no more fearing to tread on unwelcome ground, I touched upon other matters of the Christian faith as held by the Church of England. They were keen to hear all, and at the end Sor Angiolini turned towards me with a deeply thoughtful expression and said, "Send your priests here to teach us this religion—it seems to us a very beautiful one, and they will find many to join."

Every one knows that all over Italy is spreading a new spirit, and that even in the ranks of the clergy there are men who would cast off the shackles of mediæval tenets; but to find it here, in the backwaters of a mountain-valley which seemed unusually hedged in with ecclesiastical power, brought home the reality of a possible change. We read of the aspirations of the modern Italian, who

uses his wits, in the pages of "*Il Santo*" by Fogazzaro. There we find the same note struck as at Migliano, a desire for the apostolic religion without the tangle of theology, which the centuries had woven about it, and the conversion of the priesthood to something more helpful to the people.

I heard Sor Angiolini saying in a low, earnest voice: "We want less doctrine and better priests . . ." and just then the chapel bell rang out in the still air, and we hurried away for the Rosary; it was the month of May, the month of Mary.

The parish church, instead of forming the centre of the village, is a good way down the road (at least as the Southerner counts distance), so that the people had their own simple service at a shrine at the corner of the street, where a light is always burning, and little tight bunches of wild flowers always adorn a small marble *Maestà* of the Madonna. But that evening, as the roads were muddy, we all crowded into a small private chapel. Sor Angiolini, standing below the altar-step, pontificated, and did it extremely well. He rolled out the Latin prayers in a big, sonorous voice, intoned the Litany, and chanted the Rosary with the dignity of a Roman Senator. The songs and prayers from lungs which had breathed mountain air were deafening, and every moment they seemed to increase in volume. But I enjoyed the scene of heaven being stormed. This was the home of the people as well as the house of God. In the great churches of Italy it is



WASHERWOMEN

the same ; at first one criticises, and then one begins to understand. It is not the crowd of reverently kneeling people which lacks devotion. The peasant women at Migliano had locked their doors and brought their families with them ; children clung to their skirts, some sat on the floor playing with a dog, and little ones stood on a stair, twining their arms about their mother's neck and stroking the face of the baby in swaddling clothes tucked away like a parcel under her arm. A last hymn, and then only the cries of young children were heard and the whispering of village gossips, and the whole population streamed into the night. Down the wide alleys and under low and heavy arches shadows flitted, and through the place was heard the click-clack of wooden shoes on their way home.

II

The aristocracy of Migliano is represented by the Signori Ceri, who live in a big and airy house facing the *piazza*. It is an enviable position ; nothing can happen in the world of Migliano without their being aware of it, for one member at least of the family always mounts guard on the doorstep or on the balcony. The family consists of Signora Domenica, her unmarried son, a married one and his wife and child, and two nieces. Two married sons are away, one a notary, the other an advocate. Signor Remigio looks after the property, and is also the postmaster, a room on the ground floor of the

house being fitted up as a post-office with a pigeon-hole giving on to the court-yard. But as no one writes any letters or receives any at Migliano, he has a good deal of time on his hands, which he spends in wandering through his fields looking lovingly at his vines, and telling every one he will build a *bel palazzino* up there on that hill among the chestnuts when he is rich; but he makes no effort to become so.

It was a household on the old lines of Italian life, now gradually disappearing, where the mother ruled with a rod of iron. It is one of those contradictions to be recorded and not explained, that, while an Italian woman does not hold the same position as with us, and is seldom an intellectual companion to her husband—(a woman, one hears a man say with a curl of his lip, as if referring to an inferior animal)—as soon as she has sons and grandchildren about her, she seems to gain a somewhat unique position. The way they regard the ties of family, as being closer than those of matrimony, has a touch in it of Eastern feeling. Often I have noticed less affection and sympathy to exist between husband and wife than between them and their own parents. The commanding position of Signora Domenica in the Ceri household was all the more marked because of her strong individuality. Her soft cooing voice and courteous manners belied the character of tyrant, until I looked closely at the keen, searching eyes, the firm, tight mouth and clear-cut, prominent chin—it was a face showing remains

of considerable beauty. Dressed all in black with a black silk scarf wound loosely over her head, Signora Domenica looked an imposing tutelary guardian of the fortunes of the Ceri family. She has the reputation of wily diplomacy—*una grande politica*—a quality greatly admired by the Southerner. “She is a veritable cardinal in petticoats,” said Sor Angiolini with a knowing look to me one day, and something of this diplomacy I had occasion to witness. She began to sound me about a certain beautiful but inaccessible castle in their possession. Knowing privately that they were anxious to sell us the property (enough to come from England, pockets are of course full of gold), I was all the more entertained to watch the masterly manner in which she gently led me towards the subject, how cautiously she felt the ground, and then finally rounded to the proposition, throwing it out as a mere suggestion—a sudden and happy thought. I declined the castle, but applauded such art. This castle had once belonged to a noble family. Their rooms were frescoed, their furniture handsome and antique, indeed they were the owners of a great table supported on gilt lions which Ulysses had often spoken to us about with a certain awe. And they lived as befitted the owners of gilt lions: they hunted by day and feasted by night, and no one worked for their living: it was a blessed state. At last came a time when the sons dispersed, the gay doings ceased, and the old people lived quietly enough on their high hill-top. One day Signora

Domenica, not having seen them or heard of them for a long time, went up to the castle and, walking across the arcaded court-yard, knocked several times at the door of the big reception-room which gave on to it. Presently the door opened a few inches, and the Marchesa peered out with scared eyes.

"*Ma cara Lei*, what is the matter?" exclaimed Signora Domenica.

"For the love of the Madonna, give us a little bread and oil for we are starving." This was literally true; not a *centesimo* remained of their wealth; even the peasants had been pressed like the olive-berries in the stone-mill, and pressed again until now. The old Marchese, his wife declared, if a bad leg had not chained him to his bed, would long since have thrown himself over the battlements because of "the great despair and rage in his heart."

It was not long before the charitable donors of bread and oil entered into possession of the whole property. The fine olive groves and vineyards pay the new owners, as they have a working capital of some four thousand pounds, but the old castle is allowed to fall to rack and ruin, and is given over to the peasant families to live in, who work the different *podere*. They all are thin and hawk-like. They are said by the neighbours to be able to exist on hardly any food, for the Marchesi since mediæval times have kept them on short rations. They stand on the ramparts when their work is done, gazing across

the valley as if still on the watch for an enemy's pennon.

I tried to persuade Signora Domenica to repair the roof, but the memory of how a pound had melted away as if by magic was still too vivid for her to undertake any new work. They had wanted to make a drain; the stone-mason banged and chipped away for a whole week, and with very little effect on the vast wall—and the Signora Domenica assured me that she considered twenty-five francs was a great deal to pay for a tiny hole.

In spite of her easy-going son Signora Domenica is determined to make things prosper, and it was with a certain dignified pride that she showed me over the well-ordered house, her family trailing after her like so many school children. Similar to most Italian houses, both old and new, the large and lofty rooms led one into another, which always makes me picture a family going to bed and getting up in rotation. But then privacy and occasional solitude are not among the ideals of an Italian. There were many pieces of fine furniture, old *cassoni* or chests, which had held the marriage outfit of the Ceri brides, oak tables and the usual sixteenth-century high-backed chairs. In the room set aside solely for the reception of guests, the taste of the day clashed with these relics of the past: there was the inevitable circular table round which the visitors all sit, the bamboo table, worsted mats, china ornaments from a sixpenny bazaar, and a nigger in striped suit

smoking, and other atrocities more appreciated than the "old stuff of our grandparents." The house would have struck an English person, straight from their well-carpeted homes, as strangely bare and comfortless. But the Italian winter is short, even among the hills, and, on a glaring spring day, these unencumbered, tidy rooms with their brick, tiled, or mosaic floors and their green shutters, are positive havens.

These May days the Signora Domenica was exceedingly busy over the silk-worms, which are always the especial care of the Italian housewife in the country, everything being made subservient to their care. Often in the late spring it is difficult to get a room in a country inn, because the silk-worms have appropriated the best spare room.

These little creatures, only just wriggling out of their eggs, were in baskets on the kitchen table, to the great danger of the soup and all else. They have to be kept in a very even temperature, and watched all night when they are growing, in case they should lack food.

It was a mystery to me the first time I saw them how the tiny worms were inveigled on to a fresh tray of food. Then I saw how simple it was. Fine-meshed trays of fresh food were placed on top of the old ones, and the ravenous animals worked their way in no time on to the new tray, and so on with larger-meshed trays, until the final stage, when they have eaten their fill and seek a final resting-place to spin.

It is extraordinary to hear them eating ; they make a noise nibbling at the mulberry leaves like the incessant sawing of a thousand fairy carpenters. When they are ready to weave, great care has to be taken to bring the branches of heather in time, and place them properly for them to cling to, or else the silk-worms will go off in search of nice places themselves, and in all probability will choose the drawing-room curtains, your skirts, or counterpanes. The tall branches of tree heather, full of the silk cocoons, seem laden with some curious fruit. Signora Domenica lamented that silk-worms no longer bring in the considerable sums of a few years ago, when Italy had almost a monopoly, and the ladies of the family enjoyed quite a sum for pin money.

Having surveyed the house, we trooped into the sitting-room and sipped chartreuse out of old Venetian glasses. The children were very much to the fore, listening to the conversation, and allowed to do whatever they liked. The grandchild of three was kept fairly under control by being incessantly stuffed with chocolates. The mother was the scarlet-clad lady I had seen in the doorway on arrival in Migliano. Her thoughts revolved entirely round dress, the child, and the whereabouts of her handsome husband, for she is jealous of the air he breathes. As far as she was concerned, the conversation consisted of an animated discussion on the interior organs of the child, of a description of her latest accouchement and the proximity of the

next, and the possible price of my kodak. She was much exercised in her mind about the stones in my brooch, and amused the Signorina Lucia when, after two days' consideration, she decided that they were paste. Her marriage to Signor Remigio had been arranged by Signora Domenica. She was the daughter of a *pezzo grosso* of Reggio, a notary, I believe, who had given her a dowry of eight hundred pounds. She was therefore a person of quality, and her mother-in-law cared not how empty her head was so long as her purse was full. As a dutiful son, Signor Remigio made the best of a bad bargain, and openly proclaimed his good fortune, but the people of Migliano cast very critical eyes upon a "foreigner" and all her doings. The proverb says : *donne e buoi de' paesi tuoi*, a wife and oxen choose from your own country. When Signor Remigio jumps into his smart *baroccino*, the villagers all say compassionately, "There goes that good husband to town to buy a new pair of earrings for his *Signora* ; if she says to him '*Mio caro, vola,*' he flies, or at least tries to, which comes to much the same thing."

The Italian peasants are keen and swift in their judgment of people. I was amused at the disdainful criticisms passed on this lady by a lad of ten on the occasion of her losing a pearl necklace. "If she were my wife," said the little peasant boy, "I would give her a necklace ; in truth, I would give her the chain from the cauldron—*la catena della caldaia,*" and, throwing a roguish glance at me over the hedge, he ran off into the fields.

Except from a money point of view, Signora Domenica as a match-maker has not shown wisdom, and all her sons suffer from her choice of wives for them. One son, a lawyer, a man of no mean intellect and keenly fond of literature, had fallen much in love with a former schoolmistress of Migliano, who fully returned his affections. The Signorina had no dowry, but being exceedingly clever there was no reason why she should not have made a position for herself. As we know, the Signora Domenica always preferred a bird in the hand to a possible fortune in the future, especially one to be founded on books. So she cursed the marriage with bell, book, and candle. Her son submitted and carried the news to his *fidanzata*, who evidently felt at once that the matter was ended. But one last visit she paid to the Ceri household. The day she threw up her employment at Migliano, and just as the carriage was waiting to drive her away for ever, she burst like a Fury into the dining-room while all the family were having their midday meal.

"To-day," she said, "I go for ever from your accursed presence. Through your ambition you have ruined my happiness and that of your son. A legacy I leave you by which to remember me to the end of your days: may your son never have children by the wife you choose for him."

It all happened in a minute, and she was gone, leaving the family dumbfounded.

Signora Domenica chose out the strong and

healthy daughter of a peasant who had made one of those mysterious fortunes in America and could give a handsome dower. Years passed ; no children ever came to reconcile the unfortunate son to his unlettered wife ; and now they live in different towns and hope never to see each other again.

XVI

SIGNORINA LUCIA AND HER PUPILS

Casa mia, casa mia, per piccina che tu sia, tu mi sembri una badia

AS a rule the Italian woman takes her motherhood with an almost fierce absorption, and sinks her mind in the duties of housewife, her thoughts revolving round the price of things. I once asked a bright, young, married woman if she read at all—there was not a sign of a book in her tiny sitting-room.

“Oh yes, a great deal,” she answered, “I read the *Secolo* every evening.”

The charming blue stockings of the Renaissance have shown what the Southerner is capable of, and it is only circumstances which so far have caused her intelligence to lie fallow. My friend Signorina Lucia is an example of what an Italian woman can be, when she puts her shoulder to the wheel. She has all the verve, alertness, quickness and power of expression, which is shared by so many of her country-women, joined with a strong mental capacity and a voracious love of literature. Her determination, sense of humour and high spirits have carried her through many difficulties, and, at the age of twenty-two, she has the matured character of a woman ten years her senior. Her parents, both of

good old family, have always been obliged to earn their livelihood, and as head school-master and mistress of Brunella gain a miserable pittance of some ninety pounds a year between them. They have absolutely no private means. Lucia, as mistress of the village school of Migliano, earns thirty pounds, out of which, possessing no hearth, a hearth-tax of ten shillings a year is levied on her, as well as a little over two pounds towards the pension, which will come to her, if she is able to work continuously for forty years.

The home life of Lucia has been altogether happy. Unlike most Italian children, she and her younger sister were brought up with a certain amount of wholesome austerity, and escaped capricious kindness and chastisement. What spoiling they had, came from their father, who every night would sit them on his knee and tell them fairy tales, and later recite them famous passages from Dante. The Signora did not approve of the love of literature, which quickly developed in her eldest daughter. When Lucia comes to spend Sunday at home, she leaves her books behind, and, hurrying into the kitchen, begins to cook some special dish to show what a good house-wife she is. But the Signora is not to be taken in, and often moans, "*O figlia mia*, that I had never taught you to read! You will never find a husband with your nose always in a book."

Sending both sisters to college meant a good many sacrifices. Lucia has only pleasant memories

of her college life at Pisa, and her particular friends seem to have been as full of healthy spirits and keen to learn as herself. She passed all her examinations with great credit, and, directly she left, was offered a first-class situation as governess in a family of a rich Genovese nobleman. But she preferred her liberty and independence. "I am far happier here," she said to me, waving her hand laughingly around the poor, bare quarters. Obviously uncomfortable as it was, the room had an air of home. I think it was the big writing-table, piled high with books, which gave the feeling. Her scanty savings she spends on them, instead of on dress. Out of her friend's books she copies out extracts of what has most delighted her, and has a library of these notes written in a neat small hand. A great deal she commits to memory, and when she recites me whole cantos out of Dante, poems of Manzoni, Carducci, Giacosa, Pascoli, Ada Negri, and the rest, I feel the value of a few, precious books. A huge edition of Milton was among her treasures. He is a favourite poet among Italians. Of Shakespeare she spoke with knowledge and enthusiasm, regretting that the Italian translation was so bad. Of modern novelists she had read some of Dickens and Miss Braddon. In order to read the poets, she has taught herself French. D' Annunzio she was not allowed to read, and consoled herself by conning his speeches and poems whenever published in the newspapers. Fogazzaro she spoke of with

the reverence due to Italy's chief novelist, though she had to confess that he was very long-winded and too much given to polemics, in which his art as novelist lost itself. Of course her hero in modern literature is Carducci, the poet of United Italy, and of her highest aspirations. English readers can now have an idea of his greatness, as Mrs Frank Holland has translated several of his poems, for which the Italian press was full of praise. Lucia knew all about it, and marvelled how a foreigner—a woman too—could translate such a lyric for instance as "*Alle fonte di Clitunno*," which even Italians find difficult to understand.

Life is sometimes troubled for Lucia at Migliano, that peaceful-looking village nestling in a rift of a side valley between the olives and the chestnut trees. Don Filippo has a niece who is a school-mistress at a poor village on a distant hill-top, and her one object is to obtain my friend's post at Migliano. Many efforts have been made to remove her, and the contest is an unequal one, as the priest has a strong party on his side in the Ceri family, and in several members of the commune. Besides this she and her parents are what are termed *forestiere*, strangers. The memories of long ago are still too fresh for even the Brunellese to forget that her father is a Florentine and her mother a Genovese. Some day there will be United Italians as well as United Italy, but our generation will not see that day.

A few years ago, when the position of a *maestra*

was less well secured, it sometimes happened that an unfortunate woman, through the intrigues of either the clerical or communal party, would be driven from her situation and forced to beg her bread. The worst that can happen now is for a mistress to be sent to another school in the same commune, which gives the same salary, but of course her life can be rendered almost unendurable by petty and underhand persecution. I believe that Lucia enjoys scenting danger : her eyes sparkle, and an amused smile plays round her firm little mouth, as she prepares to lay her plans to meet the attack. Attempts to turn the peasants against her have entirely failed. She is much liked and respected by the parents, who realise all she does for their children. They often come to thank her ; presents they are not allowed to give, but, if she is ill, these generous-hearted mountaineers cannot be prevented from bringing eggs and chickens and their fresh round cheeses, and she has to find some way of repaying them without offence. She showed me the presents which the children themselves bring her ; there were miniature wooden shoes, a model of a plough, and a rake made in spare moments, and—most prized of all—an empty reel with a string attached, which a little one brought her, thinking the *maestra* might like to play with it on wet days. And then all the callow birds they offer, and the disappointed faces when she refuses to eat them, and begs that another time they may be left in their nests. One day some of her shepherd-boy scholars

met her on the hillside gathering maiden-hair ; next morning she found a huge bunch laid upon her school desk.

I spent a morning with the school children and saw the way Lucia had won them over to obedience. It is all the more surprising, as no teacher is allowed by law to give any sort of corporal chastisement, or even to resort to the familiar punishment of making the culprit copy out the right way to spell a word a number of times. She told me that especially some of the little peasant lads were like so many little stubborn mules when they first came to her, and seemed incapable of understanding what they had come to school for. One lad of fourteen she pointed out as an example of victory won after hard battles. He had refused to do anything she told him, indeed had usually done the reverse, but now she has him completely under control and describes him as "a veritable lamb." He is the trusted distributor of the ink, and very peasant-like is the way he metes it out, saying to his companions in a very grown-up voice : " Now then, lads, this is not water, you know, just be careful, it costs money." A good deal gets upon his own hands and clothes.

One of her trials is coping with a difficult little girl called Maria Louisa, who is very much alive to the fact that she is the grand-daughter of Signora Domenica Ceri and the protégée of Don Filippo : she thus holds quite a little lash for the *Signora Maestra*. This mingling of different classes is characteristic of communal schools. In the villages

it is less noticeable, but in the big towns the sons of the middle class may sit next to the son of a labourer or a charcoal vendor. This is brought out in "*Cuore*" by Edmondo de Amicis, which is the account of a boy's life at a communal school right through the year. It is, one may say, the most widely circulated book in Italy, and the chief reading-book in the schools. It is so mawkish in sentiment that I can only picture an English boy throwing it out of the window.

"Education is the gloomiest chapter in Italian social history," write Mr Bolton King and Mr Thomas Okey in their "Italy of to-day," and it is a sentence often quoted by Italians. As far as I have seen, it is not the fault of either children or teachers that such should be the case. These rough, untamed, half-starved mountain lads and girls are often surprisingly quick and full of natural wit and shrewd observation, and it is sad to think how many of these boys, capable of making a way for themselves in the world, are forced to go back to their sheep directly they leave school.

Some of the children that morning were very tired; one or two had fallen asleep with their heads on their folded arms; they had been up at dawn gathering faggots for their mother, and doing countless other jobs about the farms. I was amused to find that some of the boys were veritable little professors of ornithology. They knew the proverbial habits of the cuckoo, and how many eggs each species of birds ought to lay, and many

other details not learnt from books, but from watching the living world around them. One small boy told me all about a golden oriole, which had built its nest in the eave of a house, an unusual place for the lover of woodland solitude. He showed me the nest, shaped like the pointed cap of an elf, only with a dainty little lid upon it to keep out the rain.

I was much struck, as I had been at other Italian schools, by the admirable way the children read out loud ; they read naturally, and with a sense of rhythm. There is no doubt an innate feeling for language in the Italian, especially in the mountain-bred child. How musically does their greeting fall upon their ear : *felice sera a lor signori* in a lilting phrase.

And they have power to stir one, these children. A patriot of eight recited the famous five days of Milan, when even the children took part in the rising against the Austrians ; she poured forth the story in a rush of words, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks flushed. It never grows old to them. One of the smallest pupils, a girl of eight, came boldly out into the middle of the room to recite a poem by Manzoni. I have heard English children know their lesson as well, but their hands went up and down like those of a puppet pulled by a string. This peasant child was like a little actress with winning gestures and a natural feeling for the dramatic points in her recitation.

The duller things like sums they got through



THE FOSTER MOTHER

very creditably. Again I was surprised by their absence of self-consciousness once they had got interested in the problem. One boy became hopelessly involved, but instead of giving up, covered with confusion, he calmly rubbed out the figures on the blackboard and began again. In the end he got his sum right.

When the lessons were over, the *Maestra* called up the children to her, and one by one asked them if they liked coming to school and why. They all gave suitable replies—because the *Signora Maestra* was so kind, because they wanted to learn, etc. But the same little child who had recited the poem delighted us with her sincerity: looking up in our faces she answered straight away—

“Oh! I love coming to school because at home I have to nurse *la sorellina*, and she is getting so heavy to carry.”

It reverses one's ideas to see how willingly these children all come to school. Directly they hear the bell or guess the time by the sun, they scamper down the hills towards the village. Often coming from a great distance, they have to pass torrents swollen with winter rains; they emerge unexpectedly out of woods and rocky gorges, unkempt little bare-footed elves, who wash their faces with a lump of ice as they run along. Some arrive late, either because of the distance or because they had to get fodder for the cattle, and Lucia has a right to send them away. But she adapts the laws to the conditions of life, and as the late arrival stops in the

ante-room and an uneasy shuffling is heard, she calls out an encouraging word.

Lucia, like many other teachers, works under considerable difficulties. Single-handed she has to cope with seventy children, ranging from the ages of seven to fourteen, when they either go back to their fields or, if their parents can afford the expense, to the secondary schools. While the smaller ones write out sums the elder ones do oral lessons and *vice versâ*. In bigger schools the children are divided up according to their capacity, which lightens the task, but in any case the teacher has between seventy and eighty children in a class. At Migliano Lucia ought to insist upon more coming, but, as it is, there seems barely room for them, and often she has to turn old packing-cases into benches.

That morning I realised the first difficulty that a mistress has to overcome before she can start upon the regular course of lessons with her rustic scholars. They come talking a dialect peculiar to each district, often almost a language of its own, and they must leave school knowing Italian. The past definite tense, she told me, they never master, and continue to express past events in the imperfect. On the other hand they use a great many beautiful words to be found in Dante. This is especially the case in the Pistoiese, but also in our more northern Apennines I have heard the peasants use mediæval words which the ordinary young Italian who did not know his Dante would not understand. With them a child is a *fante* or a *putella*, midday is the *meriggio*,

and they always say *mirare* 'to look' instead of *guardare*, and speak of a ray of sunshine as a *spera del sole* instead of the usual *raggio*.

Lucia has to depend entirely upon her own resources to make the lessons entertaining. There is a marked absence of maps and pictures, but nothing baffles her: she draws and colours a map herself, a letter game she has made out of odd bits of cardboard, and an ingenious decimal counting lesson she has fashioned out of nuts and chestnuts strung with wire. There is no play-yard, and the children do their few gymnastic exercises packed tightly together at their desks. The condition of the windows, roof, and benches further showed the small interest taken by the Commune in the school; and Migliano is not alone in its shabbiness and neglect. The teachers complain bitterly of the difficulty they have to obtain the least thing for their schools. The Communal people only interest themselves in their own petty politics; indeed, they are sometimes actually opposed to primary education. The prosperous shopkeepers, who happen also to be in the Communal council, often object to their sons coming into contact with peasants and artisans: "They see in it a levelling force which frightens them"; while the Syndic says, as does the Cleric, "an ignorant man is more submissive." The secondary schools, where their own sons go ~~to~~, are more carefully looked after.

Latterly has come up the problem of religious teaching. At present religious dogmatic teaching may only

be given, if the parents request it, and the children of those who have not made the formal demand may not be present at the lesson. One party wishes to make religious teaching obligatory, and is endeavouring to find a basis upon which Roman Catholics and Jews may agree—surely a work for the magician! The question has become a political war-cry, and municipal elections are often decided by it. The teachers, so far as I have been able to find out, are against the motion. Many of them, earnestly religious people, give moral teaching, and have prayers before the children leave. But as the new spirit of reasoning has come among them, while they may believe in the great truths of the Roman faith, they would find it impossible to teach the entire catechism of the diocese with sincerity. They say that it would be only fair to give the duty over to the priests, who have more than enough time on their hands. At present the parish priest is supposed to give the children religious instruction every Thursday; many let the duty slide. The priest of Brunella used to prepare the children so badly for their confirmation, that in sheer pity Lucia's mother for many years undertook the duty herself. If the teachers have their way, the Italian will continue to remain in ignorance of his religion. The village priest is more often than not an ignorant person, who gabbles a rigmarole, which serves as Latin for himself and his parishioners. All Brunella laughed the other day when the priest's niece brought her Latin exercise to the schoolmaster (she was taking private

lessons) and it was a mass of blunders from beginning to end. She did not ask her uncle to help her another time.

I had often noticed the ignorance of the people about their favourite feasts; Candlemas was just *una festa della Madonna*, and the reason of their being given candles in church was never thought of; while the Epiphany was *la festa della Befana*!¹ They say their rosary the whole time of the Mass and seldom are able to tell one what part in the service the priest has reached. But I was unprepared for the surprise I lately experienced at Carrara. I went one Sunday evening with Mariannina to see a cinematograph. The theatre was packed with people—ladies with wonderful erections on their heads sitting in the boxes; artisans, quarry-men and marble workers in the pit and in the gallery. I sat among Mariannina's friends and innumerable relations. The performance was amazing to a Northern mind. First of all we saw the London streets full of traffic, then the working of a marble quarry, and an idyllic picture of Gabrielle D'Annunzio picnicking on a hill-side in a panama hat, followed by a series of comic pictures which elicited gargantuan laughter. Before we had time to recover from our mirth the Life of Christ passed in vivid and realistic scenes before us. No sacred or painful details were omitted: Christ sat with his disciples at the Last Supper and pronounced

¹ As I have shown elsewhere, the *Befana* is a mythical old woman, a female Santa Claus (see p. 313).

the sacred words, which a man murmured behind me. The shuddering figure in the flagellation fell and nearly swooned ; then the scene quickly changed and the face of the *Ecce Homo* was displayed in more than life size, every quiver of the eyelids, every tremor and spasm revealed. Neither was any detail in the Crucifixion denied the audience, who took an unimaginative delight in the painfully realistic spectacle.

As the familiar story of the Gospels was unfolded a volley of questions came from all round. Why were they killing the poor babies? What was the Madonna doing wandering about on a donkey? Who was the boy sawing wood with the old man? Oh, that is a marriage feast, but what is *Nostro Signore* doing with the *conca* of water? and who is the man walking out of his grave? and why does *Nostro Signore* walk upon the sea?

I found it difficult in telling the story to Marianina to keep pace with both the pictures and her questions.

She kept saying to me: "Oh, what a beautiful tale! where can I read all this? Yes, of course I know about the birth of Christ in the stable, and the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection and Ascension, but all the rest is quite new to me."

Other women looked on stolidly and cared not to know anything of what they saw. "Our husbands know all these things, they are very well educated," they said with evident pride, and there the matter ended.

The children ran to their fathers, but not all were able to make the pictures clear to them. I think at the time everyone's attention was fixed, but afterwards many of the men pretended to have been thoroughly bored by the whole performance. The angel who was constantly appearing to bring messages or chase away Pharisees was much appreciated by young and old; he was an ingenious cross between the fairy in tights at Drury Lane and the St George by Raphael in the Louvre.

The culmination of the evening's *tour de force* was the representation of the Ascension. As Christ was seen to rise up into the skies, his disciples showing their amazement by every gesture, and finally was received into a great concourse of angels and white-robed saints, a man behind me exclaimed: "Well, I never found it easy to believe in miracles before to-night, but, *Perbacco*, it all seems easier than sliding a block of marble down a *lizza*."

I thought that here at least the curtain would have dropped, especially as it was nearly midnight. But after a short pause a fresh series of comic scenes flashed upon our bewildered mind, in which we saw wet nurses on strike fighting with the gendarmes, and in their acrobatic encounters showing a great deal of white cotton stocking—unmistakably French. It finally closed with scenes from the life of Garibaldi, and we left the theatre deafened with patriotic shouts over Italy's universal hero.

XVII

THE EVIL EYE, WITCHES, AND OMENS

*O Luna ! O Sole !
O Stella Diana, non mi abbandonare,
Fammi rifare la pace col mio Amore.*

(Popular Stornello)

IN Italy we live in two worlds, the old and the new. We are among a people in the process of awakening: the greater number of them are shaking themselves free of tradition and searching for something to replace the ancient order of things which as yet they have not found; but others, mostly peasants and artisans, are still content with the beliefs and customs of their fathers.

But the Italian of to-day, however much he may pride himself on his modernity, shares one thing with the peasant of the Apennines and the superstitious Southerner—an inherent belief in the Evil Eye. Indeed, he literally barricades himself in against the possible attacks of the unknown. The other day I was much amused by a young Italian who took pains to assure the company that he had the greatest contempt “for all those superstitions of the lower classes.” Seeing me glance at his watch chain he hastily added :

“Certainly I wear a *cornicino* against the Evil Eye—not that I believe in such things—in these



A FRIAR



days, imagine!" and he spread out his hands and hunched up his shoulders. "But," he continued, "it is always well to be on the safe side. Certainly, although I am above superstitions, I prefer not to travel with a priest; a friar yes, a jovial friar with a sack on his back brings good luck, but a priest as black as a raven turns everything wrong."

Considering the sacred character of their office this aversion to the company of priests while going on any particular business is one of the first curious facts to strike the Northerner. In his delightful books about the Abruzzi, Signor Antonio de Nino describes a group of girls going to a neighbouring sanctuary to pray for a sick relation. If they pass a yoke of oxen they rejoice, but if they meet a priest they hurry to the sanctuary with aching hearts, for they feel that the sick person is doomed. Italians have always separated the man from his sacred office, and besides this you must remember that the parish priest is closely linked in the minds of the people with Death, of which the Southerner has more than the usual horror. With the exception of the Easter blessing practically the only time that a priest enters a house is when he comes to administer the last sacraments. "*È venuto il prete*" sounds like a death-knell to the family.

But here we only have a general feeling about a certain class of people. Woe to the individual who by some strange chance gains the character of

being possessed of the Evil Eye.¹ It is believed to be none of their seeking; indeed, who would choose so fatal a gift? It is well known that, while devout Catholics knelt to receive the blessing of the good Pio Nono, they made the sign against the Evil Eye behind their backs. The Patriots of '48 declared that the war against the Austrians was going splendidly until the Pope blessed their cause, and everything immediately took a bad turn.

In our own day the reputation of *Jettatore* has fallen upon a well-known minister, and amazing stories are told of the disasters he brings about wherever he goes. Only the other day the people of Calabria, hearing of his intention to come and look into their unhappy condition, threatened to shoot him if he came, for, they declared, they had no wish to suffer from a third earthquake.

A short time ago there was a woman in Brunella, wife of the Secretary of Commune, who was believed to have the Evil Eye. When people passed her, especially if they had children with them, they thrust their thumb between the first and second fingers and pointed it at her, saying :²

*"Finocchio, finocchio,
Non dami il mal occhio."*

¹ Books on this subject are legion, but I myself have been particularly interested in "*Le Corricolo*," par Alexandre Dumas (*Impressions de voyage*). In c. xv. he gives a short but suggestive account of the *Jettatura*, and in the three succeeding chapters follows the career of a Neapolitan prince possessed of the Evil Eye, who produces so many disasters that one feels transported into the atmosphere of an Eastern tale of enchantment.

² This gesture against the Evil Eye goes back to the days of the Greeks and the Romans.

She was a small wizened woman with a curious, shifting expression in her dark eyes, and it seemed as if the people already saw her in old age, bent and wrinkled like the Witch of Endor. She had the misfortune to lose several children—"they dwindled away like a candle as soon as they began to draw in their mother's milk," the neighbours said with ominous glances. Even the doctor declared that there was nothing to be done; the children had been "overlooked," and the mother herself was responsible for their death. When her husband was appointed to another Commune, the face of every Brunellese brightened, as if some evil influence had been removed from their midst.

When a child has been bewitched, there are several means which the superstitious resort to, in order to remove the baneful influence. I shall only tell of those which I have heard recounted by the people.

A little boy of Brunella, whom we know, became suddenly ill, and as no medicine seemed to do him any good the parents declared him to have been *stregato*. In order to discover who had done the deed the mother took his clothes and boiled them in the family cauldron. Just as the water began to boil and the clothes to dance up and down, a sharp rap was heard at the door. The charm had worked. The door opened and an old woman entered. Horror-struck she gazed at the seething cauldron, and, throwing herself upon the ground with arms stretched out towards the mother, she declared

her innocence and at the same time implored forgiveness.

The old kitchen, lighted only by the shooting flames of the wood fire, the mother still standing by the hooded chimney but now turned to watch the charm work, the old woman, a black kerchief twisted like a turban round her head, holding the child in her arms as she murmurs her secret incantations to free him from the evil influence, form a picture which brings back the feeling of a song of Theocritus. Only in the Sicilian land it is a love-sick maiden who sits weaving her spells.¹

One day while I was on the track of witches I was told that our Ferruccio had once been bewitched.

"Yes, it is quite true," said Pietrino, his father, who was busy planting roses on the ramparts, "and it happened in this way. When Ferruccio was about ten, he suddenly became very ill; he grew weaker

¹ There is also a mysterious ceremony with a saucerful of water and a few drops of oil, in which the features of the person who has caused the evil are supposed to be discovered "as in a photograph." Adelina has seen this done; Signor A. de Nino writes of it. Here is another way out of the difficulty: if on a Friday night, as the lights are being lighted, a black cat enters the house, catch it by the hind quarters and make it mew seven times; at the seventh mew the *malocchio* or evil eye will disappear.

Sir Edward Burne Jones, on a visit to Perugia, was walking about the town during the latter part of a sleepless night. Suddenly at the top of a steep and narrow street he saw a naked man spring out of a doorway and stand swinging a black cat, and he saw them clear cut against the sky just as the dawn was breaking. This was related by a friend of his, and has always remained in my memory in connection with the hill city so full of mysterious power.

and weaker; he dwindled away like a candle and became as thin as my little finger. It was no use taking him to the doctor, because, you understand, he was bewitched."

As Pietrino said—"era stregato," he dropped his voice to an impressive whisper and stuck out his neck; his eyes grew round and startled and his thick short beard seemed to bristle; then he spat vigorously.¹

"At last," continued Pietrino, "I determined upon what I should do. I would spend a good sum—*una somma discreta*—and take Ferruccio to the parish priest of Lusina; he is well known to have a power over evil spirits. Early in the morning we started to walk up the valley—Lusina is high up in the chestnut woods—and when we started it was a fine day and we saw three lizards on the road. 'Good fortune is with us,' I said to the boy. But just as we came within sight of the church, big clouds rolled up, and the sun went in, and it began to rain and to thunder and to lighten, as I had never seen it do in my life before. 'The devil is angry,' I said to Ferruccio. We hurried into the church to fetch the *Signor Parroco*, who came very quickly to the altar and began the service. Just as he was reading out of a book commanding the demons, behold a great noise was heard as if hell itself had been unchained, and a thunderbolt fell

¹ Spitting is believed to get rid of the Evil Eye: *sputum malum*, as the Romans called it. The mere mention of witchery alarms the superstitious.

close to the church. At that moment I saw a shadow steal away from Ferruccio's side and disappear into the darkness."

Pietrino paused, frowning at the remembrance of that day. Then seeing me still intent upon his tale, he drew nearer and, as if confiding to me the secret of his life, he muttered under his breath :

"In that shadow I recognised the features of an enemy, of one who had always sought to harm us."

"The whole thing was a huge success and I got quite well," shouted Ferruccio in his cheery voice from the other side of the garden ; and certainly one could hardly find a healthier specimen of youth than the once-bewitched Ferruccio.

After this conversation I discovered with great surprise that the practical and hard-headed Pietrino lived partly in a world peopled by witches and hobgoblins, of which he told me something, his eyes blinking in his excitement all the time. Some mischievous sprites, he declared, inhabit the hill-side just beyond us, and are constantly running away with the linen which the peasants have laid out on the hedges to dry, or else they shuffle them together in an untidy heap in the dust, and when the poor women return they tear their hair in despair. "The witches have been here," they scream, and all the neighbours run out to see the havoc.

Then there was a man known to Pietrino who lived on the hill near our miraculous Madonna, and there seemed no doubt about it that he was a

wizard. Indeed, all Brunella knew, and many more people besides, that he owned a wonderful book in which were written all the secrets of the magic art. If he opened the book, the devil came surrounded by flames, and he had the power to make him do his bidding. If he put a spade in the ground, it dug for itself, so that at last he grew prosperous and built himself a stone house ; and all this because of the magic book. But when one day the wizard-peasant was in the fields looking at the work done by his wonderful spade, he suddenly saw flames shoot up from his house ; he knew what had happened—his little boy had got hold of the magic book. House and child were burnt, the book disappeared, and the wizard became a poor man and had to earn his bread like any other Brunellese. All the people said "*Poverino*," but really they were rather pleased at the loss of the book, for that self-working spade had always annoyed them.

Pietrino is wholly illiterate, keeping his accounts on a notched stick, which may partly explain for his believing—or inventing—the story of the magic book.

And now, kind readers of these letters, I beg in charity that you never breathe a word in Massa Carrara that I of Brunella have written a book. "The *Signora* writes and writes all day and never gets tired," they say. "She has many friends in Great Britain and writes letters to them all day long. Blessed are those who have a head for such things—yes, and patience too."

But supposing they found out that the written word got printed in those mysterious characters, of which so many still stand in awe, who knows but that I might be branded as a witch; *chi lo sa?* The spirits of the Fortezza would again be unchained; and with what care have we not laid them now three Easters running, when the priest comes round with asperges and holy water? Only ten miles away up the valley the witches still dance of a night in a half-ruined house just above the road. Strange lights appear at the window, and the witches dance in a circle round a cauldron, "naked as they were born." How my friends, who pass beneath the house at a trot with their heads muffled in their shawls, know all this, is very wonderful, but then Italians always seem to know more than they see. These, of course, are the mysterious witches who fly about in the air on broomsticks, and on a particular night of the year transport themselves to the south, saying as they travel: "Under the sky and on the wings of the wind—under the walnut tree of Benevento." For some reason they cannot travel about on a Saturday, and that is why you say as a charm on mentioning a witch: *Sabato sia, Signore.*"

The witch of flesh and blood, to whom the disappointed lovers go, to weave strange spells and brew love potions, live in quiet back streets in the towns or are to be found in isolated hill villages. One old fortune-teller, a real *strega*, I found at Carrara. La Violante lived in a low quarter of the

town, to which Mariannina's cousin refused to conduct us, but one morning we escaped his vigilance and paid her a hasty visit. Her one room gave on a side road, and through the half-open door we saw a bed, a bare table, and a little charcoal range; the lintel was guarded by a small bas-relief of the Madonna. Dressed in a patched gown, a tawny kerchief on her head, beneath which fell a few wisps of white hair, La Violante looked as poor as her lair. But Mariannina says that a good many *soldi* are hidden away somewhere, for she has an appointment for every moment of the day and no one gives her "less than twopence and sometimes they give her a silver franc."

She shot stealthy glances at me and kept up a running commentary as she threw the greasy cards in fantastic patterns upon the table: "Oh, I tell the truth—*proprio la verità*—and if you come on Friday the cards go best of all. My clients all know that La Violante is as good as her word, they are not always so good at keeping a bargain. Only the other day I foretold that a *Signora* would give birth to a son. 'Now, Violante,' she said, 'if you are right I'll give you a new cloak.' Well, the *Signora* got her son but I never got my cloak." And her eyes twinkled, though she shook her head sadly.

"*Fiori, fiori, fiori*," mumbled Violante as she turned up the court cards, "and they are all *fiori del Morettino*," for the dark-haired knave always appeared at every cut of the pack.

"Do you know a *Morettino* who is in love with

you?" and she turned on me a searching look, but she evidently did not expect me to answer so compromising a question.

"My husband is fair," I remarked

"Yes, there is a *Biondino* too, but *Ecco il Morettino*, who loves you well: here are letters to delight you and all good things, always from the *Morettino*. Flowers, flowers, flowers, from the little dark one."

The absurd thing was that Violante predicted I should receive a letter containing a sum of money, which was to be entirely for myself, and within a fortnight I received a small and totally unexpected legacy, which arrived by cheque in a letter. Consequently, Mariannina now believes more than ever in La Violante, and keeps a sharp look out for the *Morettino*.

In Naples you can get a witch to knock, with many charms and incantations, twenty-four clout-headed nails, and six wire nails, into a green lemon, and fasten them together with string, which must be crimson. "Then you put this deadly symbol, *Fattura della Morte*, in the house of your enemy and await the result.

Here is a vivid note I received from my aunt, Mrs Ross, who had been asked by Dr Tylor to procure a Tuscan charm for the Museum at Oxford: "I do not remember the name of the wreath of dirty things, old teeth, feathers, hairs, little bones, etc., which I got for Dr Tylor. It may have been *Fattucchiera* or *Corona della Morte*, but I am not sure. I know



A WITCH

U of M

1840

that everyone said I was going to kill my husband with it, and I told Dr Tylor he had ruined my reputation. I had to pay a "golden Napoleon" for it, and I at once put it in the oven to disinfect it, it smelt so horribly. There was a good deal of bother about the whole matter, as another *Corona* had to be got and put into the person's bed by stealth."

To a weaver of such spells as these went young Ernesto, who fell in love with a pretty young Brunellese who drove him half silly with love, and then laughed him to scorn. The first night we arrived at the Brunella inn, after our journey out from England, we saw the "half-witted one"—the *scemo*, as they called him—in all the tragedy of his unhappy passion. We were sitting out of doors in one of those delightful inn gardens so common in Italy, made out of the narrow space between the house and the next block of buildings. The whole was covered by a pergola of vines, the greater part given up to a bowling alley, while the upper end was a raised daïs, with small tables and lights hanging among the young vine leaves. While we were thinking how hungry we felt, and how nice it was to be dining out of doors, Ernesto stalked out of the inn, followed by a group of friends bent on dinner. Ernesto, with head thrust forward and hands behind his back, seemed above such consideration, as he paced the pergola and every now and again disappeared into the dark alley.

"What is the matter with that poor young fellow?" we asked our *Padrona*, "is he mad?"

"No, no," she laughed, "*un boco innamorato, povero giovane.*"

As in Italy everyone's love affairs are generally known, and proclaimed "as a great secret" from the housetops, it seemed the most natural thing in the world that the merry company should discuss Ernesto's chances of winning or losing the fair lady of the window. I had not then fallen enough into the swing of the Brunella speech to be able to follow the conversation at all closely, but I could enjoy the whole thing like a scene on an Italian stage, where no speech is needed to realise the spectacle. Every time that the youth flung himself out of the darkness with eager gestures, a rush of words in praise of his *innamorata*, every time with his last word, like a finished actor, he turned upon his heel into the gloom again amidst the mocking laughter of his friends.

It was all very well, while the fair Ninetta looked out of the window at him, like the little flirt she was, and turned his serenading into a cause of witty merriment for her friends; Ernesto bore every slight she put upon him with the patience of Job. "He has no spirit in him," said all the maidens, laughing at him. But when one day Ninetta called out to him that she was tired of being poor, and of doing ~~tricot~~ ^{tricot} lace all day, and was going to wed Signor Maso, the rich grocer up the street, Ernesto went off to a weaver of spells. Whether he got a *Corona della morte* or gave a hair of his rival to the witch, I never discovered. I can only relate that

the prosperous grocer died, and Ernesto, decidedly pleased with his handiwork, recommenced his serenading, while the neighbours now looked on somewhat with awe. Ninetta was exceedingly angry, and hastily rushed into the arms of another elderly suitor, this time a wealthy wine-merchant from a neighbouring town, and poor Ernesto paid another "golden Napoleon" for a witch charm. But the wine-merchant was proof against evil (no doubt his watch-chain bristled with coral hands and sprays of rue and silver lotus flowers); and Ernesto still walks about the streets in a dreamy manner, submitting with great patience to all the chaff of his companions; even the word *strega* fails to rouse him, and they whisper to each other: "He really is silly from love, *poverino*."

Our Adelina, though as busy as most people, has had her opportunities of looking out upon the Brunella world and all its host of lovers, and one of the chief lessons she seems to have gained (which she kindly passes on to me) is always to burn your combings yourself.

"I have had three *innamorati*," says Adelina, without a tinge of pride, "and see how wise I was not to give them a lock of my hair for I was not destined to marry any of them. You must trust a man very much before you give him any of your hair—it is well to know it—for a single hair held in the candle by a person who wishes you ill and pronounces the incantation will be enough to bring about your death. And man is very capricious."

O prudent little Adelina!

Although the fortune-teller or *strega* is much sought in Italy, there are ways, very simple ones, of divining the future without the aid of wise women. The people themselves can teach you to be as cunning as any augur, and that without moving further than your bed-chamber. There are two feasts set aside for omens in the popular calendar: Ascension Thursday and the day dedicated to St John the Baptist, June the 24th.

Ascension seems the only feast besides Christmas and New Year's Day on which the Italian refuses to do the smallest jobs of any kind. Other feasts he observes as he pleases—that is, he refrains from his daily work, because it is a very pleasant thing to sit in the sun and smoke a pipe with his friends, but, if it happened to suit him, he would work. But even those who scoff at church and saints, solemnly declare that if any task is done on Ascension Day the ants will come into the house, and we all know the misery of that plague. When a girl wants to know if Fortune is to favour her during the year—to her Fortune means a well-favoured husband with plenty of *soldi*—she sets a stone-crop freshly gathered on her window-sill, and if next day all the little tendrils are stiff and still full of sap, it augurs well, but if they droop there is mourning in the house.

The Florentines have a more picturesque method of divination, which carries us back to the time of classic legend. On Ascension Thursday the *Cascine*

is full of family parties picnicking in the grass and busily catching grass-hoppers, which they put into cages of brightly painted wood and gilded wire, a veritable cage for a doll's house. Everybody takes a *grillo* home and entices it to sing with a perpetual supply of fresh lettuce leaves. If before the end of three days the queer little sound is heard the family is sure of good luck, exclaim in delight, "*canta il grillo*," and immediately give it liberty; but if the *grillo* dies without performing this dutiful return for hospitality the family is despondent. We are told that Pisistratus set up the emblem of a grass-hopper¹ in the Acropolis to avert the Evil Eye from the Athenians, so the Florentines know what they are about.

Why Ascension Day should have become a day of augury I cannot say, but Mr Warren Fowler, in his "Roman Festivals," throws light on the question why so many omens are looked for all over Italy on the feast of St. John the Baptist. As people see the bonfires on the hills in every part of the country, or watch the dome and towers of Florence picked out with fairy lights, or witness the festival as celebrated outside St. John Lateran in Rome (which I do not recommend unless the traveller is in search of a bacchanalian orgy), few perhaps stop to think that under another guise the Summer Solstice is being celebrated. Even the symbol of the sun is

¹ Originally the cricket or grasshopper was adopted as an amulet from its likeness to a skeleton, the symbol of Chronos or Saturn, who protected the earth from evil.

not wanting, for is there not always the wonderful wheel of fire-works which burghers, artisans and peasants so appreciate? That the dedication day of the Temple of Fortune, the favourite goddess of old Rome, took place at the Summer Solstice may, as Mr Fowler thinks, be the reason why the feast of St. John should be a favourite day of divination among the Italian people. The Abruzzesi, always in search of good luck, put basins of water filled with sweet herbs on their window sills, and in the morning bathe their hands and face. In one village the children go and bathe in the river and frolic together like the nymphs of Boccaccio. They twist garlands of bryony round their hips, and, crowned with flowers, return in a merry procession to their village . . . *e poi si mangia*.

San Giovanni tells our Carrara maiden what kind of a husband she is to marry; you see she does not inquire whether she is to wed or not; the mere possibility of remaining an old maid would be too awful to contemplate. But San Giovanni tells whether the *sposo* is to be rich or poor, and this is how he sends the message. On the eve of the feast the anxious maiden takes three beans: one she shells, the second she half divests of its skin, and the third is left entire. Shaking them, with eyes tight shut, she places them under her pillow, each wrapped up in a piece of paper, and in the morning, again with eyes tight shut, she chooses out a bean at random and thrills to see her choice. If it is the "naked bean," as she expresses it, she is doomed to

marry a poor man who has not even a shirt to his back ; if it is the bean with half a shell her husband will be an artisan who is fairly well to do ; but if she draws out the whole bean, ah ! then she laughs and claps her hands, for it is sure that she will marry a very rich man—*proprio un riccone*.

I asked Adelina what had been her fortune with the beans. Rather crestfallen she replied : “ *Cara Lei*, the naked bean has always fallen to me. Perhaps it is Destiny.” And having settled the reason of such dire ill-luck, she gave a whimsical laugh and the clouds cleared from her brow.

For historical accuracy I must add that, since writing this, a letter has arrived from America, from a Brunellese emigrant, now a prosperous chemist’s assistant, who in most eloquent language invites Adelina to share his fortunes : “ I promise always to love you,” he writes ; “ come and we will live *a modo Inglese* for the rest of our lives,” which Adelina tells me does not mean comfort, but “ plenty of love and esteem.”

“ Oh ! *Padrona mia*, if you could only see Peri ! He has two eyes, bright as jet, and wears a cravat, and I——”

“ Yes, Adelina, and you ? ”

“ Well, and I, when I marry him, shall be able to wear a hat.”

“ Then the bean did not tell you true.”

“ *Ma che !* I never tried the bean omen this San Giovanni, but at the New Year I kicked my *soccòlo*

down the stairs and it flew right out of the front door, and then I knew——”

“ You knew, what did you know? ”

“ Why, that I should follow my shoe out of my father's house before the year was out, and see, the man I have always had in my eye is now my *damo*. ”

XVIII

MESSER IL DIAVOLO AND ANCIENT RITES IN MODERN ITALY

Dove il diavolo non può mettere la corna ci mette la coda

THE tangible and the intangible are blended in the minds of the people, and the innocent but unhappy possessors of the Evil Eye, or the guilty witches and wizards, seem all to be driven to their tasks by the Prince of Darkness. Both from the people and the pulpit we hear a great deal about the devil in Italy, and, as a pleasing relaxation, are given a picture of the Madonna, who appears just in time to save her children. Only the other night the four-year-old boy of Mariannina nearly screamed the house down, and amid his sobs told how the devil, "black as charcoal and with horns like an ox," was just going to carry him away, when the Virgin suddenly ran towards him and caught him in her arms. "*O Madonna mia*," cried the little fellow, hugging his grandmother and aunts in turn, who were all greatly agitated by his dream. One thinks of the curious picture by Niccolò da Forlì in the Colonna Palace in Rome, which might stand as the illustration of the haunting fear of little Andrea. What nightmares the mediæval child must have suffered from!

Quite a study of the Devil can be made in mediæval literature; in Renaissance times he appears again, but age seems to have dulled instead of sharpened his wits, and the ordinary mortal has small difficulty in getting the better of him. Straparola tells an excellent story in his "*Notti Piacevoli*," where the Devil takes a wife to see if women are really as tiresome as mortals say. But here I am wandering into the sixteenth century. A genuine piece of popular literature of our day I take from Signor Antonio de Nino, that diligent pilgrim to all the out-of-the-way corners of the Abruzzi country. To these people, and indeed to all the peasants and shepherds of the hills, the Madonna, the saints, and the Devil are very living personalities, and they are always making up stories about them in the most natural way in the world.

"San Martino was to arrange a marriage for a friend of his. He therefore set out upon his journey. On the way he met the Devil, who said to him: 'Whither away, Martino?' And he replied: 'I am going as ambassador of love for a friend of mine.' And the Devil: 'I also should like to come too, and in this way the bargain will be made all the quicker.' San Martino answered: 'On the contrary, please do not come; for if thou comest, nothing will be concluded.' And the Devil: 'But yes, indeed we shall arrange it, and arrange it much quicker.' San Martino did not wish to appear boorish, so the Devil went with him. When they reached the bride's house, the Devil said: '*Signora Sposa*, I also am

an ambassador of love.' The bride said: 'You do **me** too much honour.' Then San Martino said: 'You do not know the bridegroom, but I assure you **that** he is a good-looking man.' And the Devil **added**: 'More than this, he is very handsome **indeed**.' San Martino continued: 'He is also rich: **he** owns five palaces——' The Devil broke in: 'Dost thou not remember that he possesses not five **but** seven palaces.' San Martino, always looking towards the bride, continued: 'The bridegroom **has** seven pair of horses.' And the Devil: 'Take **care**, for he has more, he has seven times seven.' San Martino: 'He owns twenty-seven yoke of oxen.' And the Devil: 'He possesses forty-seven.' San Martino: 'Forty-seven is the number of his flocks.' And the Devil: 'These really are eighty-seven.' San Martino, to conclude: 'But I must tell you that the bridegroom is blind of one eye——' And at once the Devil: 'No, that is not true; he is blind of both eyes.'"

The marriage did not take place. But the lady thanked the Devil, who had thus known so well how to place the cards on the table.

While Lucifer and his crew prowl about the earth, seeing where they can put their horns and what sauces they can mix for the marriage feasts, another race of demons have dominion over the rain, thunder and hail clouds. Indeed, poor mortal man lives between two fires. From my friend, Professor Bellucci of Perugia, I have learnt something about a curious legend still held by the peasants near

Città di Castello concerning the fall of the angels. According to their account the rebellious angels divided into three bands: those who repented and were re-admitted into Paradise, those who followed Lucifer into Hell and those who rebelled against him and remained suspended between Heaven and Earth. These two lots of demons are often at war. When the demons of the upper air stamp upon the clouds and come into collision with Lucifer's crew, there is thunder and lightning, and the innocent dwellers upon the earth are doomed to suffer from the fierce contests. Those who have been in Italy know the tragic results of Southern hail, which usually comes just as the fruit is setting, the corn ripening, or the grapes ready to be gathered in. All watch the sky with dread, but it is the poor hard-working peasants who feel the full force of the disaster, and it is the peasant who tenaciously clings to every superstitious means of averting the evil. When the thunder-clouds are seen approaching, especially if among them there is one which assumes the shape of a priest's hat, the head of the family—the *capoccio*—takes his gun, in which there is a small piece of wax from the Good Friday procession, and shoots up into the stormy sky. The peasant women hastily snatch up all the iron implements, carefully removing the wooden handles, and with a great clatter throw them onto the threshing ground, contriving to drop some of them in the shape of crosses. The family crowd in the doorway anxiously scanning the skies, while a baby in arms (always procurable in an

Italian family) is held up, and the mother hastily rings the tiny silver bell at its neck which some pilgrim of the family has brought from the holy shrine of Loreto. In this some would see the idea of prehistoric sacrifice of children.

The people of Braschi recite a particular prayer in unison, as they stand among the confusion of iron spades, rakes, shovels, pokers, and cauldrons, which is not without its touch of grim humour. "O blessed St Longinus, intercede for us that it rains without lightning, without thunder, without hail; that it rains at Castiglione, yes,—at Braschi, no. Our Father which art in Heaven, etc."

The jurisdiction of St Longino stops at the confines of Braschi, and the peasants think that he need not trouble to save the crops of the people of Castiglione.

As a last resource the peasants take out the iron chain, which holds up the cauldron over the fire, and they shake it vigorously. Because of its connection with the devil, who, on seeing it, is alarmed, remembering the time when he was chained up in hell, many consider this an awful resort. But the good peasant is sometimes ready to risk his soul in order to save his crops. It sometimes happens that, when all these precautions and prayers have proved of no avail, and the ominous sharp click of the hail is heard, prayers turn to curses, and the people in a rage hurl their holy images, pictures, blessed medals and olive branches out of the windows into the fields. In this they resemble the peasants of still

further south, who lock up the statue of the Madonna or patron saint, who has turned a deaf ear to their prayers, in a dark cupboard as chastisement.

The learned explain that the terror iron is supposed to inspire in all evil spirits may have arisen from prehistoric times, when iron was a newly discovered and therefore a dreaded material. No doubt the famous iron devil of the Mercato Vecchio in Florence was put up against the Evil Eye.

Very general also is the belief in the efficacy of bell-ringing in order to chase away the hailstorms, or, in other words, the evil spirits of the air. Although Charlemagne fought against the baptism of bells and even forbade it with an edict, it became a ceremony of importance, and even water from the Jordan was sometimes used. The sonorous periods of the Latin invocations still adopted by the priest fall as echoes direct out of the dark ages.

"Bless, O Lord, and vivify with your holy spirit this water and the bells destined to call the faithful to divine service, that, bathed by this water, wherever their tolling reaches, they receive the power to expel every evil phantasma and to dissipate the whirlwinds and the tempests.

". . . O Lord, bless these bronzes, that at their sound the piety and devotion of the faithful shall be kindled. That their knell, echoing against the power of the air, may dissipate the storms from the north and the hurricanes, put an end to the crashing sound of the thunder, the flash of the lightning, the scourge

of the hail, the strength of the tempest. Raise, then, the arms of thy divine power and strike the malignant spirits with fear, that, terror-struck, they flee at the sight of the holy vessel of the Cross stamped upon these bronzes.

“ . . . Thus when the sound of these bells pierce the clouds, the angels will descend to drive away the Satanic hordes, and continually protect the harvests, the goods, and the body and the soul of thy children, O Jesus Christ.”

The bells of certain villages often earn the fame of being particularly dreaded by these malignant spirits. The people of San Gemmini declare that, as some of the milk of the Virgin Mary was spilt over it, the demons fear its sound exceedingly. On a mediæval bell belonging to San Francesco d'Assisi, which has since been recast, was graven the following couplet :—

Sabbatha pango, funera plango, fulgora frango.

Excito lentos, domo cruentos, dissipo ventos.

(I ring in the Sunday, I lament for the dead, the lightning I break. I hurry the sluggards, I vanquish the wicked, the winds I disperse.)

The etiquette as to which bell in a town should lead off with its pealing is well established and carefully followed, in some places the honour belonging to the communal bell, in other parts to the bell of the cathedral. And woe betide the priest who rings too late, for if the demons are already journeying upon the clouds across the sky, the ringing will be of no avail ; it is only efficacious when the tolling begins just as they have jumped into their saddles

for their ærial journey. The office of bell-ringer is therefore a responsible one, and it has often happened that the sexton has been found struck by lightning at his post, his hand still grasping the bell-rope. This ringing is called *sonare alla malacqua*, or *acqua ria*.

Innumerable are the amulets used by the peasants against the hail. I have seen medals of St Benedict nailed on to the trees, and sometimes the ashes of the yule-log strewn across the fields. Professor Bellucci has many curious amulets in the interesting little museum in his own house at Perugia. He once came across an embroidered heart of silk and tinsel, in which was enclosed a prehistoric arrow-head, which an old peasant woman had hung at the head of her bed between the pictures of her patron saints. She venerated it as a holy relic, and always lit a candle before it when she heard a storm brewing, for, she declared, such was its power that neither hail nor thunderbolts would come near the house.

Of course in our day these superstitions seem silly and childish. And yet, when everyone has become oppressively sensible and up-to-date, I, for one, shall be sorry that they are gone with all the old-world customs which form so large a part of the charm of Italy. Living among a people who seriously entertain the possible intervention of witches and devils, and attribute every unforeseen event to Destiny or to spirits, often makes me feel as if I were taking part in a fairy tale, and it is not an unpleasant sensation thus to renew one's childhood. Yes,

what children they are, and how ancient are the beliefs and customs they cling to! Here the folklorist finds a Greek custom, there he sees the influence of some Etruscan or Roman ancestor, while the Italian of to-day tranquilly continues to perform these rites without ever troubling his head as to their origin; indeed, why should he? they have become part of his being.

In a way the Church is responsible for the preservation of many relics of the ancient world, for the Roman priesthood has always appropriated from the past all that it could; and in this they thought to show much wisdom, thus to wean the people gradually from their paganism; but it is extremely doubtful whether they have ever wholly succeeded. The modern Italian mother still carries her sick child to the little circular church at the foot of the Palatine, just as the Roman mothers, in this very temple, used to invoke the great Twin Brethren. It is now San Toto, to whom they pray, as St Theodore is familiarly called, and the priest comes with "bell and book and candle" to chase away the evil. They may neglect to give the child medical aid, but the visit to San Toto is never missed. Early on Thursday or on Sunday morning the curious may see the ceremony, and witness the faith of the people. At all other times the little temple is closed, which sets the imagination working, and surrounds the place with a mysterious charm.

Again, the priest is sought for as an exorciser of spirits by every householder at Easter time. Holy

Week is dedicated to the blessing of the houses within the town, and after Easter comes the turn for the farms and country houses. It is a ceremony as old as Rome itself. Our priest here is kept very busy those days, and often has a long walk to the boundaries of his parish. From our eyrie we see him start off along the dusty road, carrying his yellow stole and white cotta on his arm, while the two small acolytes run beside him, swinging the silver holy-water stoup and asperges in their race.

The peasants receive him with a great show of joy, and take him into all the rooms which they wish to be blessed. There has been a great commotion and cleaning up, "because the priest is coming"—indeed, it is their spring cleaning. As the priest comes downstairs and stands upon the threshing-floor, the *massaia* brings him an offering of eggs, and, if she can afford it, drops a few copper coins into the holy-water stoup. At the end of the day he has so many eggs that he has to send them to the market. The *Prevosto* is always very pleased to come and chase away the devils out of the Fortezza; the people jeer a little as he puts on his best cotta and stole, but our own opinion is that it is as much the variety in his daily round as the extra donation which appeals to him. Our small offering, being of paper, cannot be dropped into the holy water, and while I am placing it in the envelope the good father looks the other way; then as we shake hands we pretend that an envelope is

all part of hand-shaking, but really we each know that the other knows. He is a simple person with a round, good-natured face, a portly person, and clean hands. While he blesses our blossoming roof-top, he stops to look at everything, and to see how the roses have grown since last year.

"Now, let us go and bless the young cypresses," he says, "and on the way we must not forget the cistern, nor the window-boxes and the seeds."

"Then there is the new potato patch," interrupts Ferruccio.

"*Già, già,*" he answers, "you are right. And, Signora, you *are* going to photograph us again this year, *non è vero?*"

The conversation is kept up as a running accompaniment to the showering of holy water and the murmuring of prayers. Then he catches his cotta in a rose—

"*Perbacco,*" cries the *Prevosto*, as he looks at the tear in the lace.

On the Rogation days it is the fields and the vineyards and the olive groves which the priest is called upon to protect, and, with the blessing of the Church, to foster the spirit of vegetation. Mr Warren Fowler says that the priest of to-day does much what the *Fratres Arvales* did in the infancy of Rome, when they led the procession of victims through the fields, driven by the garlanded crowd, carrying olive branches and chanting.

Fortunate is he who witnesses the scene at Assisi on a clear and sunny morning, when everything seems young except the piazza of San Rufino—that bore a look of age and pain when it was built. After the procession through the narrow streets and into the open country, all return with song and prayer to this little brown piazza of the cathedral, where the blessing with the sacrament is given to the kneeling crowd. Then the arch-priest, in yellow cope beneath a baldachin of old gold, and carrying on high the pyx, the canons in purple capes trimmed with fur, and the members of confraternities with crimson and yellow tippets, all file into the cathedral beneath the doorway of sculptured griffins, gargoyles, and strange birds and beasts, and their voices grow faint to those in the piazza.

Ah, visions of long ago, how they haunt us still in all the byeways of Italy, yes, and in the heart of her cities too. The pagan and the Christian world meet and join hands, and if by happy chance you are present at the meeting, you will feel a thrill as if something out of the mysterious past had taken shape and become warm to the touch. It is moments like these which make days golden for old age.

Only the other day we met a countryman on the high road who, instead of the usual greeting, gave us a steady look and dropped the one word: *SALVE*. *Felice sera* now falls tamely on our ears. . . .

Then again, as we were wandering about one afternoon in an unexplored corner of the country,

we asked our way of a passing peasant. His answer came like a flash :—

“ *Per Diana !* I will show you the road,” and he strode ahead through the chestnut woods, beckoning to us as he went.

XIX

SOME PEASANT FRIENDS

*Oh! la mia Mamma sempre mi dicea
Che non mi innamorassi alla montagna!
Il montanin raccoglie poco grano,
E la speranza ha su la castagna
Che quando la castagna va fallita
E quando la castagna va fallita
Il Montanin fa la trista vita
L'amor del montanin bell' è finita
E quando la castagna va falace,
Il montanino fa la trista pace*

(Popular Song of the Apennines)

THE traveller who, on his way south of the Alps, looks out of his carriage window upon irrigated fields, rich in crops, lemons, and oranges, gardens and hillsides terraced and planted with vines, does not always realise the wonder which lies hidden. Then comes a Tuscan valley waving with green corn, millet, and maize, slopes shimmering with fruit blossom and olives, maple trees garlanded with vines, and he thinks of Italy as a garden which the picturesque peasant daintily cultivates as he sings his love songs.

The truth is that only in parts is Italy a richly fertile country, and her summer droughts and sudden tempests of rain and hail are perhaps harder to fight against than our want of sun in the north. To the

Italian people we owe a great part of this seeming miracle of luxuriant plenty—to the peasants who laboriously have irrigated the plains of Italy, have turned sandy wastes and the barren rocks of the Apennines into cultivated fields, and steep, arid cliffs into vineyards and olive groves. Not a square inch of ground is ever wasted, and the possible return of the soil, calculated to a nicety, is induced to yield up its full promise by incessant and vigilant toil.

But these very people, the backbone of Italy, are those who for the most part lead a life of suffering and of grinding poverty. The women are withered at forty, the men toil on like so many driven beasts, and *pazienza*, if any real profit went into the pockets of the toilers. For what is all this thrift and labour? To eat a little bean soup and a hunk of coarse maize bread, and clothe themselves with a cheap flannelette bought from the travelling *merciaio* who climbs many a steep hill with his pack. The Italian, so quick with his knife to avenge a small wrong or a supposed insult, is the most patient being in the world in bearing the great ills of life; and they recount their misfortunes with a dignified submission to the inevitable. Only in some parts of Italy, where Socialism is rife, are they beginning to realise their poverty and the possibilities of a different sort of life. When they are all fully aroused, one wonders what will happen. At present they take the good and evil in life as part of the great scheme of the world. Few bright gleams come to them from without;

but they are naturally gay and light-hearted, and directly the sun shines and the earth yields generously, they respond in song. How a ringing voice, suddenly breaking the silence of the vineyards, seems to reveal the poetry of the land, and the misery of the singer is forgotten!

In our valley we are in touch with many sides of peasant life. Within sight of us, across the valley, and only six hours' journey between carriage-drive and walking, we reach the smooth green grass of the *Alpi*, where in summer the shepherds take their herds and flocks. They live in stone shelters, hardly distinguishable from the rocks around. Some we saw on the heights of the Apennines, set above a lake which lay in a deep dell, like the mirror of Venus, with giant beech-trees¹ stretching right down to its sea-green waters. Range on range of mountains, bathed in opalescent summer mists, lay below, and beyond the white shimmer of the Po marked the great plain. From a summit we saw the Gulf of Genoa, like smooth, beaten gold in the setting sun.

Far below the summer pastures, and yet still high up in the *Alpi*, come scattered hamlets whose grey stone houses and pent roofs of slate look as if they

¹ Within the last two years these magnificent beeches round this mountain lake have been cut down by the timber merchant in search for railway sleepers. Only the stumps remain, and there is no effort made to replant. Italians themselves say that there is no country in the world which has better laws, but no one troubles to enforce them. In the same way the rivers are being despoiled of trout by dynamite and netting—contrary, of course, to the excellent laws, which no one respects.



THE UPLANDS

had borne the brunt of many an Alpine winter. In the summer time all is alive, and there is a wealth of flowers in the luxuriant hay-fields. But in the late autumn the whole population, with the exception of the old and decrepit, moves down into Tuscany and the Maremma, some to mind their flocks, the others to search for work as day labourers. What those months of solitude must be like to these old people left in the snow-bound villages it is impossible to imagine. The shepherds of the Abruzzi are met with in the extreme south, but generally without their families, whom they only see for a short period of the year.

These migrations of men and herds have gone on since primitive times. The mountains and hills have a network of grass paths and mule tracks leading in every direction, which pictures a people for ever on the road.

In our immediate neighbourhood we have no big landed proprietors. The *Padroni* of the peasant under the metayer system, or of the day labourer, are only the well-to-do artisans, local shop-keepers or notaries, who with the peasant proprietors divide the valley between them. Some of these proprietors living in Brunella assure me that they make their land pay ten per cent., and, considering the wages they give their labourers, I can well believe it. The chemist owns a few terraces at the foot of the fortress hill, and keeps two cows and some sheep, all of which is looked after by a little crooked man, called Franceschino, who works like a machine

from morning to night, and is paid four shillings a month, and is graciously allowed the leavings from their table. He sleeps with the cows. Another proprietor, an advocate, works his farm with one man, who is offered the alternative in wages of thirteen shillings a month and is given his food (bean soup and maize bread, be it understood), or one pound six shillings a month and no food. On the other hand, when he has to get in extra labourers, especially during the harvest, he cannot get any one under two shillings a day.

On our walks with Ulisse we have got to know several of the peasants about here. Often we have come upon hamlets several miles from any road, where the women all ran out to gaze at us like a herd of cows. Then one of them has come forward and asked us to forgive them for staring, but we must have "*compassione*," for it was the first time they had ever seen a woman wearing a hat!

Because of the hospitality of our peasant friends, who place their fields at our disposal, we enjoy the feeling of being immense landed proprietors without owning a single acre. "*Sono padrone, padronissimi*," they say, with old-world courtesy. Characteristic, too, of these mountain-bred people is their independence. We have always found it impossible to give them a present; a loan they will sometimes accept, and in this way. The first time that we had left a few things at a peasant's house whose little girl was ill, such as white bread and sugar, which are luxuries to them, we had no sooner returned

home than I heard a voice from the drawbridge commanding me to come down. Irritated at being ordered about like a child, I leant over the ramparts and said whoever it was might come up. To my shame, I found it was the mother of the sick child, who had hurried after us, with her skirts held up full of fresh eggs, and holding a struggling hen by the legs. These, she said, were the only things she had to offer, and apologised "for the disturbance we had taken" on her behalf. She was very distressed because "her man" had not asked us into the house, a thing which would never have happened had she been at home, but then her husband was somewhat of a bear—though a good bear, she added, with a laugh.

Once when several months had elapsed I began to breathe, thinking that at least one family had accepted the few sweets and bits of stuff given to the ragged children. At the time the mother had looked distressed, saying, "How can I compensate you for all this?" as if a fortune had been given her. But at Christmas-time she appeared with a basket on her head full of gifts for "her illustrious friends"—pigeons, eggs, a chicken, dried figs, and nuts and white grapes, kept over from the vintage. Her tact, too, was exquisite—these gifts I could not regard as exchange but as Christmas offerings which every proprietor receives from his peasant *mezzadri*. It will be seen that the profit is all on our side. Their hospitality is on the same footing. Even passing strangers are sometimes pressed to

taste their vintage, and no labourer or peasant eating his onion or crust by the roadside fails to beg of you to partake of it with the familiar "*vuol favorire*"? One day, seated with a strange medley of people at a wayside inn, we offered a hard-boiled egg to a toothless old man, half mendicant, half casual labourer. He was delighted, but before beginning to eat it he offered us a penny, and, as we refused it with much amusement, later in the day he brought me a bunch of wild flowers.

Yet, side by side with these generous feelings, lies a vein of parsimony, almost of avarice. They will haggle for hours over a halfpenny, and a family feud can arise over the profits of a hen. Italian natures are perhaps more full of contradictions than most.

From the first moment that I saw the Pomarino waiting barefoot in the hall and heard him ask for work in his low, pleasant voice, I felt a more than usual interest in the man. We were in want of a labourer, and engaged him at once; he looked so thin and poor, and was full of a certain dignity which seems born of the mountains. He would sooner have suffered hunger than begged—this we knew afterwards—and he was honest as the day. How he worked that winter for his one-and-fivepence, a little wine, and a plateful of *maccheroni* at midday. Before seven he arrived, and until nearly six he dug and turned up terraces and carried baskets of stones from the moat as if he had never enjoyed anything so much in his life. Even so, the Brunellesse

blamed our improvidence for undertaking work in the winter-time when the days were so short. Directly an order was given, *Si Signore* rang out in his cheery voice, and away he ran as if his feet were winged. It always gave me a sense of exhilaration to watch him leap on to his spade at a bound and drive its sharp point into the earth.

With the usual open speech of Italians, and reluctance to gloss over the common facts of life, he is known as the *Bastardo di Pomarino*, which by no means is meant as an insult; it is only proclaimed as a matter of course. Especially where a peasant family is childless or has but few children, a foundling is often adopted. The well-known foundling hospital at Florence supplies the neighbourhood with these *innocenti*, who often retain this designation as a surname. I have only once come across a case where being an *innocento* was treated as a stigma. We were picnicking in a wood, and a group of children, like so many nymphs, were playing on a space of fresh grass near a fountain. Of a sudden there sprang into their midst an angry woman. She directed her tirade of maledictions upon a small boy of eight called Bolio, who was convicted of having stolen a wooden ball off a bed-post. This brief event was made the most of by the woman, who had a wealth of language I have never heard surpassed, and a power to hold her audience spell-bound by her dramatic gestures. She reminded the child of his dependence on the charity of her household, and asked how he had

repaid her goodness. Bolio hung his head and looked as if he felt that the last judgment were at hand. "Ugly bastard," shouted the woman in a last clap of thunder. And the sound of "*brutto bastardo*" seemed to echo through the woods as she turned swiftly on her heel and disappeared among the trees. The children, taking hands, glided away to their games further afield, and left Bolio standing by a gnarled chestnut tree, a sad, lonely, little figure.

Although our peasant friend of Pomarino does not consider his birth in any way a disgrace—and his foster-mother loves him even more than her own son—it has left some bitterness in an otherwise gentle nature. He cannot forget the fact that his own mother should have abandoned him at the Pisa Hospital. "A ticket was round my neck," he said, "as if I had been a piece of merchandise at a fair; I was laid on a wooden tray from the outside, and some one from the inside of the hospital pulled it round. And I was brought up among a hundred other nameless babies, until my good foster-mother adopted me."

"And if by chance you found your mother now?"

"If I saw her at this minute," he answered, "I would spit upon her and curse her. She abandoned me, her own child."

One summer's day I visited his mountain valley. Wading through a river, balancing uneasily on the edge of a mill canal, and winding up through the chestnut wood out of sight of human habitation

made me feel the limit of the world had been reached. The village of Pomarino consists of a handful of grey stone houses huddled together for warmth and companionship, and is surrounded by terraced vineyards, and then again by the chestnuts. Cows and sheep with tinkling bells, followed by crimson-stockinged children, wander out of it in the early morning to the upper slopes, and men and women go out to their terraces to dig or to gather in their scanty harvests; the doors are locked, the windows barred and shuttered. Only one woman sits ever at her window, laughing at nothing, crying at nothing, singing in the intervals a strange barbaric melody. The notes start out of the silence like the sudden speech of the tortured soul from the tree in Dante's wood. She is the "*povera pazza di Pomparino*." She lost her reason soon after her husband started for America, and no one has had the heart to write and tell him. Indeed, I doubt whether any one knows how to write in the village. So at any day he may return, rejoicing with a few hard-earned savings, and hear that same eerie song which fell upon our ears that sunny morning.

Our friends are as poor as it is possible to be without actually starving. Owing to the produce of their fields being insufficient to support them, they do not carry out the patriarchal system, where mother, father, sons, and their wives and children, and again the grandsons with their wives, all live together under one roof. The Pomerino has therefore done an unusual thing in leaving his home and coming to live

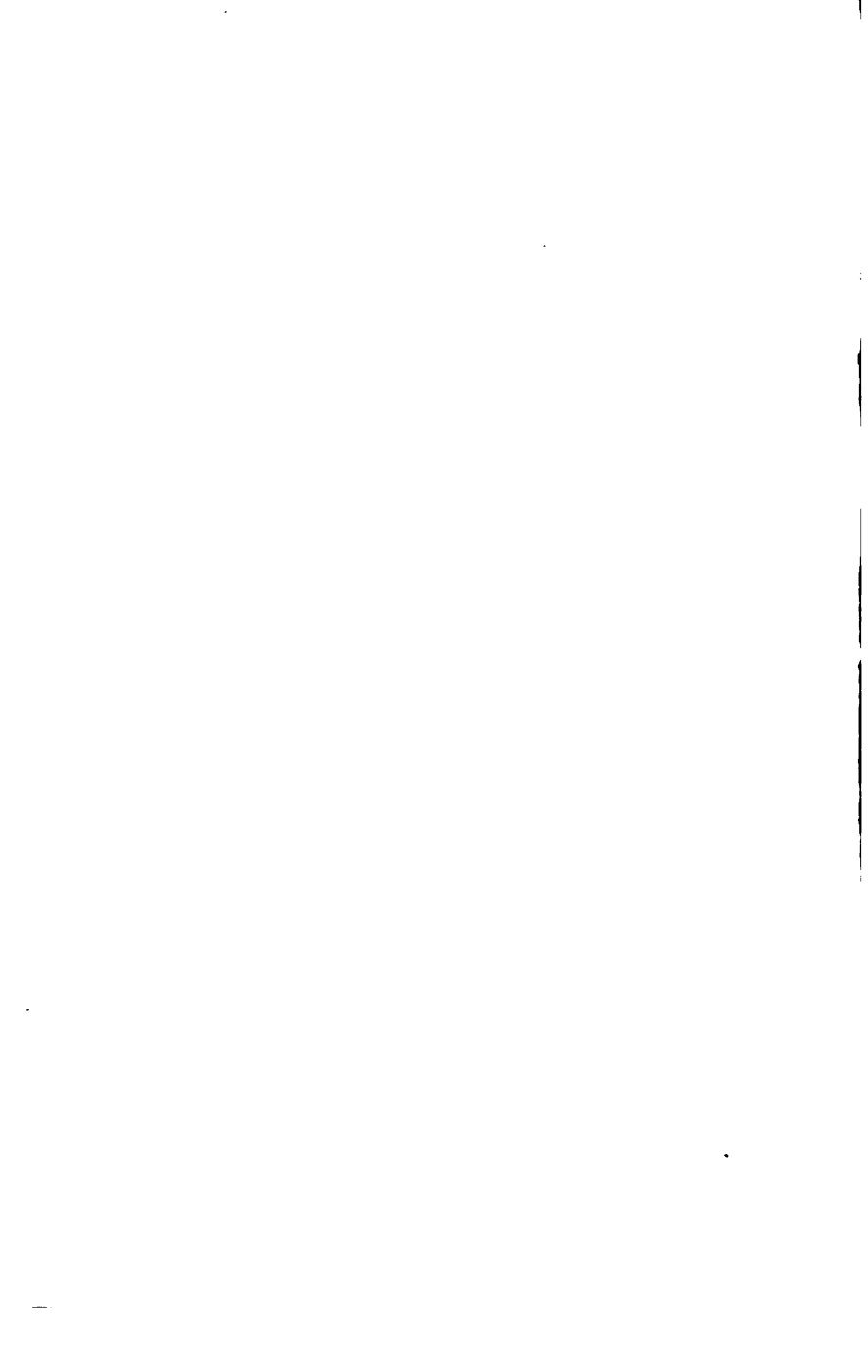
in the house of his wife's parents. She is an only child, and so he helps them to cultivate their few terraces, and goes out as a day labourer whenever he can get work. He himself owns nothing but a large family of little children. If the necessities of life are scarce at Pomarino, ready money is still scarcer, and it is the need of a few pennies which drives the women down into Brunella with those heavy bundles of faggots,¹ and perhaps a few eggs, if the foxes have spared the hens. In winter time it is so cold passing the torrent-river that they have to light a fire directly they reach the other side. And on their return the first question their children ask is : " Little mother, have you brought us any white bread from the baker ? "

There was no doubt that the Pomarino had married Maria for love. Among the peasants there is little barter and traffic for a wife—indeed, poor people, they have not much to bargain over. The wife brings the marriage bed, some linen, and a chest, and a pair of long gold earrings. No one is prosperous enough to sink a dowry in the pearl necklace of many rows which the peasant bride of the Val d' Arno wears of a feast day. The Pomarino

¹ A very strong woman can carry as much as 115 lbs. on her head but the usual weight of faggots and brushwood brought by the women from the neighbouring hills is about 67 lbs. Often they are within a few weeks of childbirth : it has even happened that a woman has had to turn back half-way, leaving the faggots by the roadside, and just as she reached home has given birth to her child. It is extraordinary to watch the women carrying great stones in a basket on their heads for the building of a house or a bridge. They move along slowly and erect, and look like so many caryatides.

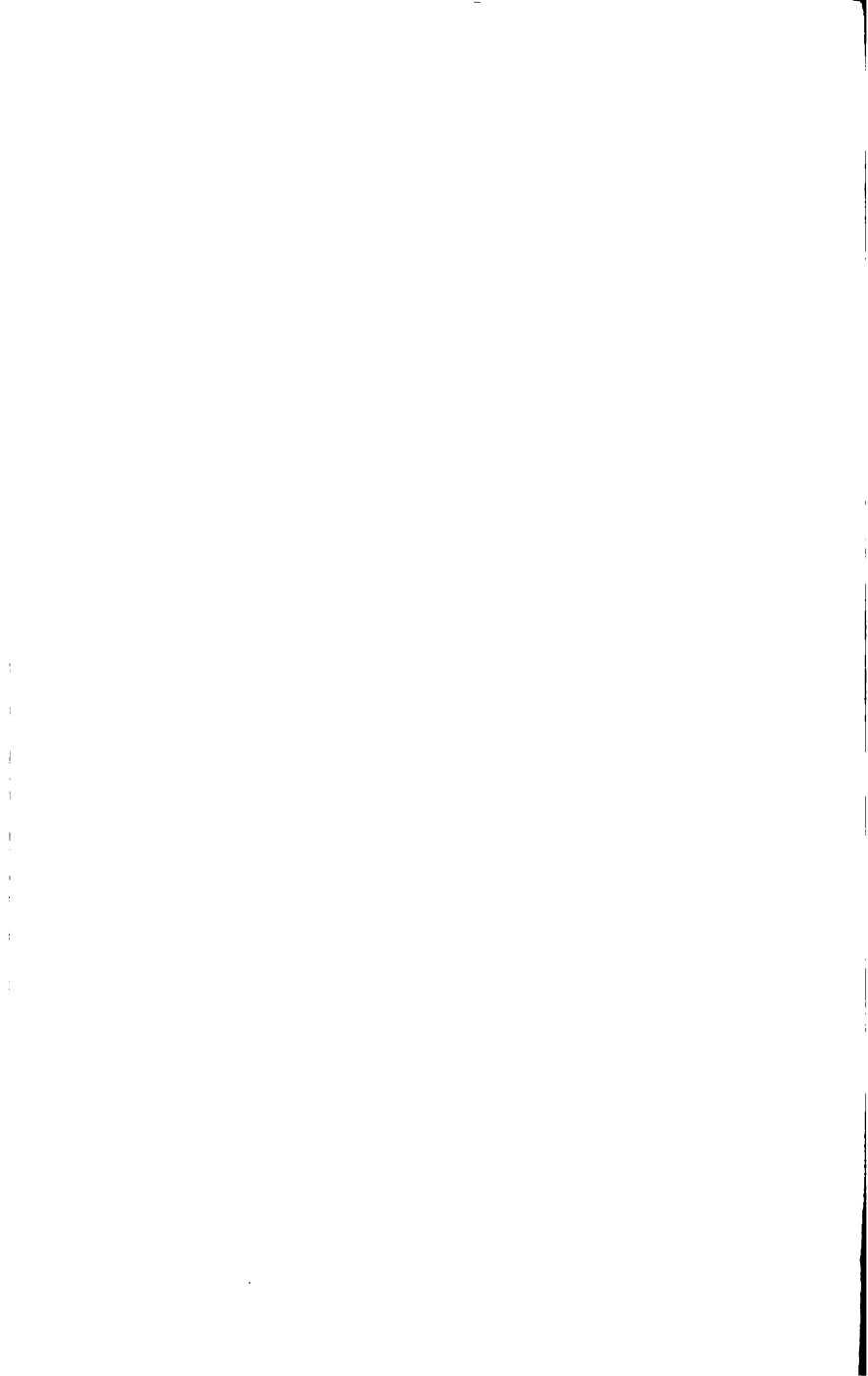


THE POMARINO





PEASANT WOMEN



had been offered a wife at Venice, where he went as a soldier to serve his three years. She was the daughter of a small manufacturer of screws, and the bait offered was a place in the business. He told us that steady work, whatever the weather, had tempted him—the bride, we gathered, was not beautiful ; but he referred the whole matter to his superior officer, whom he called his *Padrone*, who advised him to return to his open life in the fields.

When he came back to Pomarino, Maria had grown into a pretty girl, and he found that she was quite willing to listen to his love songs.

Maria made me her confidante : “ Oh, what a lover he was, and how he used to sing to me. Every evening, even when the snow was deep, he passed our house singing, and I used to run to the window to listen while he went on to his home, and my mother always scolded me until I got back into bed again. And every first of May he brought a branch of *acacia* in flower and put it by our door—that is what we call *cantare il Maggio*.”

Hard as their life is, they are a most happy and devoted couple.

The house, where the Pomarino lives with his family and old father and mother-in-law, has that enviable characteristic of the Italian rural house, a broad terrace, covered by a vine, on to which the kitchen and bedrooms open. It is reached by an outside staircase, and the arched space beneath is used to store dried leaves and a jumble of farm instruments. Inside, the house was bare but clean :

beds, a few tables and chairs, two wooden chests, and a large flour-bin was all the furniture they possessed, scattered through three rooms. Their real home is the fields and the wood, even to the baby in arms, who is settled in a shady corner on his father's coat and given raw green peas to nibble. Things are bearable, when there is health, but, when illness drives them into their hovels, the misery is difficult to picture. The day of our visit the pretty young wife, Maria, was still weak and ill after a serious attack of typhoid. I shall never forget their inefficiency in trying to make an egg cordial, while their sole cooking utensil was the huge cauldron over the wood fire, out of which Maria ladled a little watery soup and vermicelli. A little girl of two, seated on the kitchen floor playing with some beans, the sun shining on her fair hair, was the only cheering object to be seen. Maria told me of the weary hours she had spent alone on her sick-bed, and the pain it had been to her hearing the others go out to work, while she lay helpless. Then there was the knowledge that the few halfpennies saved with such care, and treasured in the box under the bed, were fast melting away. Fortunately her illness came in the good weather, but in the winter they wait patiently, and often in vain, for the visit of the communal doctor. The *Medico condotto*¹ is obliged to attend the poor of his

¹ The *Medico condotto* of Brunella, with a big circuit, is paid forty pounds a year by the Commune. Those who can afford it give a few pence or so for a visit.

district, and for nothing, but it sometimes happens that the weather is too bad for him to reach the mountain hamlets. Only the winter before, Maria told me, the Brunella doctor had been unable to attend a cousin of theirs, a young girl, because the river was in flood. The other nearest doctor was over the crest of the mountains. After four days he was able to get down to Pomarino, but the illness had gone too far. The despondency of the relations, who always take the gloomiest view of the case, hardly acts as a tonic. Every one crowds round the sick-bed, doing little else but chatter, and exclaiming every now and then: "*Cristo, Madonna!* our dear one is going to die."

"*Sarà come Dio vuole,*" murmurs the patient.

"These peasants of Pomarino are well off: they own a field and a vineyard," I have heard people remark. It was only another example of what I have always felt, that while in England greater depths of poverty are found, where the want of sun accentuates the want of food and clothes, here in the south the general standard of life is infinitely lower.¹

¹ "Italians," says Signor Ferrero, "have been used for two centuries to live on half rations." According to the calculations of Prof. Albertoni, the daily food of the peasant comes to cost a little under fourpence. When he serves in the army he is allowed very nearly twopence-halfpenny more than this a day, and consequently after a year he has increased in weight and height. It seems incredible, and must be taken as one of the lowest estimates. The Tuscan peasant, for instance, is better off. The day labourer must find it equally har-

After all, everything is by comparison. Our friends of Pomarino may indeed seem affluent to others who herd on the summits of the hills about us, and have many miles to go in search of work. They live with their pigs, and like them. Sometimes it has happened that while the mother has gone to fetch water from the spring, a pig has bitten off the hand of the child asleep in its cradle, which indeed looks but a trough. I have seen a man who has lost an arm in this way.

There is another class of peasant proprietors who find life far harder than the ordinary peasant *mezzadro*. Around us there are several families who have sunk their small capital in a mediæval castle with an olive grove, some terraces of vines, and a little meadow-land for their beasts. In good years all may just be well. But if the wine fails, and the olive crop is only abundant once in three years, or disease appears and the vines must all be replanted, the proprietor must borrow money. If he borrows from a people's bank, of which there are now several, things will not be so bad; but with the Italian's desire for secrecy and to do a little business over a private counter, usury still flourishes, and he gets into the clutches of the local tradesman. It is impossible for these small holdings to show much return

to feed himself and his family, considering the low scale of wages. Round Florence you get a labourer for one shilling and fivepence a day, and no food or wine, and for this he often comes ten miles from over the hills, only returning on a Saturday to his family. About here the marble works and immigration have greatly raised the wages, as there are fewer to cultivate the land.

when money cannot be spent on them; and the Government taxation is so heavy. Another spoke in the wheel of progress is the tenacity of the uneducated Italian to traditional methods of agriculture, which are extremely picturesque, but hardly in accordance with modern requirements. His critical faculty is also limited: a cherry is always a cherry to him, whether it be a wild one or of a good quality. With his hands he works as steadily as the world goes round, but of intellectual laziness he must in justice be accused.

So these peasant proprietors live on from day to day, paying the taxes as best they can, and stinting themselves as well as Mother Earth, until they begin to look like gaunt hermits living in the wilderness.

It always seems strange every time I go up to Monti to see a bare-footed, ragged group of children run to greet me from out of the great covered entry of the mediæval castle. Four massive circular towers and the main block of the building rise abruptly from the hill-top, proudly commanding the whole country side. To the north you look down upon pasture land and over the tops of immensely tall poplar trees; on the other sides, across olive groves and terraced vineyards down to the swirling river. It all brings back the past in a flash. They of Monti and others near have stepped into the eyries of the powerful lords of this valley, who at a sound from their bugles could rally an army of retainers to march in aid of Barbarossa. They built these very castles, most

of them on the summits of the hills above the beds of torrent rivers. And to build them, the country folk say, their retainers formed a chain from river-bed to hill-top, and handed up the great stones.

The railway has cut straight through the middle of one magnificent castle in the valley. In the part which remains, numerous peasant families herd with their cocks and hens, and in the ruinous *sala*, with a *loggia* looking out on to the length and breadth of the valley, sits a little old lady bending over a *scaldino*, and wrapped in a black woollen shawl. She is one of the last descendants of this ancient family, allied to kings and emperors, and with a genealogy going back twelve centuries.

To-day at Monti the hay and Indian corn are stored in the vaulted and frescoed rooms; the family bed stands in the chancel recess of what was once the chapel; and the peasants pass through doorways sculptured with warrior helmets and menacing lions, and sit round the fire, where the chimney-piece bears a delicate Renaissance pattern. And every year a bit of the roof falls in.

There seemed to be a world of children about me that day: they ran out of dark corners, and assembled on the threshing-floor, some nursing babies, others playing with bill-hooks and pruning-knives, while the mother sat on the wall knitting. One little girl kept pulling at her rags to cover up her thin, white limbs; another sister, standing in front of me, presented a pathetically comic figure,

dressed in her father's coat, which reached to her naked feet. They all had refined features, but there was a hunted, starved look in their fine eyes, and the babies had uncannily wise faces.

"How many are you?" I asked little Beppe.

"*A momenti siamo sette*," he answered, looking gravely at me.

I turned to watch the waning summer light upon the Carrara peaks, and started to feel a small, lean hand slip into my lap. Looking down, I saw a dried fig, and then again a chestnut. With friendly, but half-frightened gestures, the youngest foster-mother kept pressing these gifts upon me from her slender store. Beppe began to feel it his duty to entertain me, and commenced a tale about a little companion of theirs who comes to play with them, and last year fell into the field below. I looked down the wall, and shuddered.

"Dead, of course," I murmured.

"Oh no!" cried Beppe, "Sant' Antonio saved her; of course, if it had not been for the saint—his shrine is just there in the corner—of course she would have died."

"If she had fallen on her chest she would have hurt herself more," interrupted the little foster-mother.

They were anxious that I should see the "hen of Sant' Antonio," which roosts in a young olive tree near the small marble bas-relief of the saint let into the wall. By craning my neck I saw a lean, long-legged fowl which I had to praise. Just then a

pair of kestrels flew over our heads, and the children told me the way they would fly, and in what particular field they would find a snake for dinner. They showed me the hole in the tower where they lived, and brought up a downey family every summer, and the homes of the white owls which hooted all night.

"These owls," said Beppe, "have faces just like Christians, even to the whiskers."

"Birds of death," murmured the mother, "*uccelli della morte.*"

.
Fior in sul ramo !

*A Roma ce l' han fatto un Papa nuovo,
Ma a me nessun mi trova un altro damo.¹*

Higher up our valley, where the mountains close in, and the road begins to ascend steeply towards a pass into the Lucchese, a castellated fortress stands boldly out into the rocky ravine. It possesses every characteristic of the romantic castle, and every age has laid some mark upon its battered walls, from mediæval times of warfare to the days when cloistered nuns came to live in it and built a chapel and a belfry against the face of the rock in the midst of the castle.

Up there in the mountain stronghold, with her people who farm the terraced hill, lives a girl and her little son whom she cherishes and hovers over

¹ Flower on the branch !—At Rome they have made a new Pope—But for me no one finds another lover.

with an almost ferocious motherhood. If she is not watching the child, her eyes search the high road across the gorge.

*E vedo e non vedo che voglio
Vedo le foglie di lontan tremare,
E vedo lo mio Amor in su quel poggio
E al piano mai lo vedo calare.¹*

Her whole attitude is of one who waits; she knows that her lover will never come along that road for her; but it is something to see him pass. Her Guido "drew her heart out of its place" before she had left school, and she had trusted him as she "trusted the Madonna herself," she told me. One day together they went to Genoa to embark for Tunis, where she had a married sister, and he was to find work. "Wait for me here, *Carina*," he had said, and brought her up to the deck. But when the ship started she was alone among the emigrants. Even then she had not realised the full measure of his treachery.

Out there, in a strange land, she gave birth to a son, little Guido, with the dark brown eyes and curling hair. That other Guido lives in the town at the turn of the road where much traffic is done, and all is bright and busy. He is sleek and prosperous looking, and spends his afternoons lounging at the café in the piazza. Just across the way sits his wife

¹ I see him, I see him, or else my heart deceives me—I see far away the leaves quiver at his coming—I see my beloved up there on the hill top—But down in the valley he cometh no more.

at her counter, an elderly widow, with a well-stocked shop.

*Amore, Amore, Amor ! passa quei poggi.
Amore, Amore, Amor ! vienimi a vedere
Vienimi a vedere innanzi ch' io mi muoia
Innansi che m'accendan le candele !¹*

¹ My Love, my Love, my Love ! pass thou those hills—My Love, my Love, my Love ! come thou to me—Come to me before I die—Before they light the candles around me !

XX

THE OLD AND NEW IN THE PEASANT WORLD

Sa più il Papa e un contadino che il Papa solo

THE Romena family live in a grim little stone house at the foot of the Castle hill. A family of seven crowd into three rooms, which includes the kitchen. Montan, the old grandfather, is allowed a small sort of pigeon-cot over the kitchen, while father, mother, two sons over fifteen, a boy of nine, and a girl of seven all sleep in one small room crushed into two beds. This degrading practice of overcrowding is found everywhere in Italy among the poor—fortunate are those who have a bed at all, for often they have to sleep in the stables. Another family I know are disposed of in this way: the grandmother and grandfather in one room with a child of four; next door a widow and her two sisters in one bed, one lying with her head at the foot of the bed to give more room, and in the second bed their brother of twenty and his two nephews, children of the widow. Of course there are excellent laws against such practices, but what of that in Italy. Considering the upbringing of the children, who often at twelve know more than they need ever know, it is astonishing how nice-minded they are. The Romena family feed like the poorest peasants; when they do ring a

change with *maccheroni*, it is served with a sauce made of oil and garlic. On great feast days I have known them kill a young pigeon and eat it with a mess of rice ; it must have been quite a game seeing how many shreds of meat fell to each person. Both husband and wife are small landed proprietors, and own two cows, a donkey, and a pig. Their terraced vineyards are unusually fruitful, and the cellar underneath their kitchen holds four titanic vats of wine, which has an excellent sale in the neighbourhood. Living so near Brunella, it is easy to dispose of their milk, and off and on the men have been able to get several jobs on the railway. One way or another things have prospered with them, and there is absolutely no reason for them to live like the poorest mountain peasant and dress like paupers ; but an Italian is inclined either "to do himself too well" and get into debt, or else to exist on the barest necessities of life and put every penny away.

Montan was the first member of the family we made friends with, as he had done odd jobs on the Fortezza lands for the last forty years, a wonderful old man of seventy-eight, who puts many a young man to shame by the way he toils on. He seems to make for his work like a bull at an enemy ; he even grudges the time taken to give an order, and is away to his job before the last word is spoken. Often at midday his family forget him, lock up their house, and go off to their fields, and only by chance we have discovered that he has had no food since eight. His cheerful theory is that if he gets

some hot coffee and bread at nine he wants nothing till evening. While his fellow-workers take a little rest after the midday meal, casting a compassionate glance upon them, Montan strides back again to his spade. There have been times when we have wished him endowed with less energy, for he works havoc among the bulbs. If we show him the wounded root of a favourite rose, he says, "*Già, già*, I must have speared it, but it'll sprout out on the other side."

Once he was induced to sit for his portrait, and to console him for inaction we gave him potatoes to peel and peas to shell. Directly his task was over he took the first opportunity to slip away. I met him hurrying down the hill, and thought that he looked guilty, as he said the *padrone* had finished with him. He works for pleasure and not for gain. He keeps the account of his days here on a knotted stick, and very often forgets to cut the notch. "What does it matter?" he answers to my expostulations, impatient at being interrupted at his work to discuss the matter.

He is a man of few words, in which he is very unlike his countrymen, but occasionally I have been able to make him talk of the old days. He remembers, after all not so very long ago, when the men all wore knee-breeches and a short jacket, and the women bright-coloured stays and embroidered chemisettes. You may see such a woman in the roof of the Sistine Chapel. That was the time when there were no roads, only a mule-track over

the mountains to the sea-coast, and not enough bridges, so that people constantly got drowned in the floods. They all ate bread made of bean flour and used wooden or pewter platters. His grandfather has melted down all their pewter into weights for his fishing.

"Now," says Montan, "Brunella is no longer a village, but a *castello*,¹ with a train of its own, a post office, a syndic, and shops full of white bread, and ever so many *signore* who wear hats."

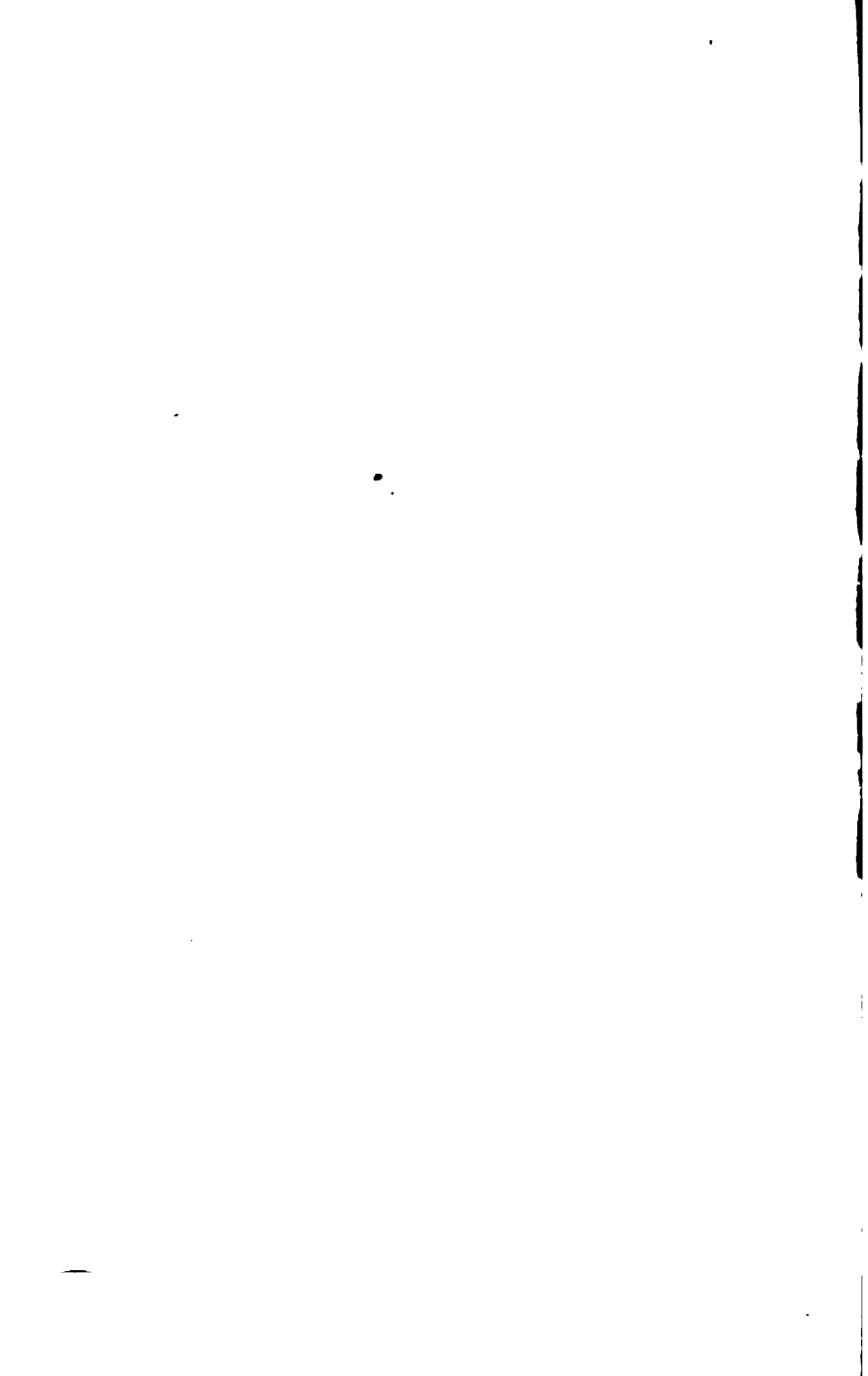
I have never elicited whether Montan appreciated the change or not. As long as he can work, and drink his bottle of wine on a week day and a more generous supply on the *festa*, he does not trouble himself about the progress of the human race.

The rest of the family were a good deal here or there on one job or another. Assunta, Montan's daughter, helped in the washing, brought the milk, and carried a hundred parcels up our hill. She would often accompany us on a walk. She met us one summer evening on our way to picnic by the river. "I will come too," she said, and hastily shot the basket of fodder she was carrying into the stables. She never left our side until we unpacked our sandwiches, and then she slipped away on an expedition of her own, picking up her petticoats well over her knees, she strode into the river and paddled with all the en-

¹ A *castello* is bigger than a village and smaller than a town, but it has the local government in miniature of a city. Take, for instance, the neighbouring village of Migliano, it is in the commune of Brunella, in the province of Massa Carrara, and in the state of Tuscany, and in the kingdom of Italy.



THE PEASANT'S MEAL



joyment of a child. Whatever hour we want her services or her company she appears at the moment, so that we often wondered what happened to her family and farms. But the farms do not suffer ; she is up at dawn to feed the cattle, and digs in the fields like a man. As for the household duties—well, Ferruccio, her son of fourteen, does most of them, for Assunta is not a housewife. She has been known to forget all about supper, and her family sit down to a hunk of bread and some wine. Montan, whose teeth are nearly all gone, misses his hot soup, but Pietrino, the father, is delighted, for he does not mind any discomfort so long as money is saved.

Pietrino is fully twenty years older than Assunta, and I have always wondered why she did not choose a younger and a handsomer husband. One day she told me how many times he had asked her to marry him before she would finally consent.

“Every winter evening Pietrino used to come to our house while we were sitting round the fire drying the chestnuts ; and sometimes I let him sit next to me, and then he thought that I would be sure to say ‘yes,’ but I always said ‘no.’”

The joke seemed to amuse Assunta even at this distance of time, and a mischievous look danced in her eyes.

“What finally made you change your mind ?” I asked.

“Well, one evening as I was returning from our farm I met Pietrino, who was returning from his bit of wood at the top of the hill, where he had been

cutting down trees. He had such a fine colour in his cheeks, and his eyes were so bright, that I promised there on the road to be his wife."

Pietrino, whose thrift steers near to avarice, has endeavoured to engraft his views on Assunta, and I have often been amused to watch the unconscious struggle within her between lessons taught and her own generous impulses. How delighted she was to come on Christmas day with a basket full of presents, old bottled wine, pigeons, and apples, and I know not what besides, and whenever we met her she always brought chestnuts or walnuts out of her capacious pockets. Then came a day of reckoning, for a barrel of white wine. In vain I tried to get the price they wanted, but always came the answer one learns to dread in Italy, "*faccia Lei*"—you make the price. If you are wise, you never will make the price, but patiently see the game out. At last I handed the matter over to Mariannina, who asked why she refused to give an answer.

"Oh," said Assunta, with a little burst of confidence, "I am so afraid not to ask enough."

Pietrino, with all his faults, is an excellent worker, and, like most Italians, can turn his hand to any job; he also dealt more tenderly with our rose trees and bulbs than Montan. The rapidity with which he and Ferruccio put up a pergola astonished us, and it was a truly Italian delight to sit in the shade of a vine and watch a work spring up as if by magic, and feel thoroughly busy doing nothing. First of all, they went into the wood on the steep western slope

of the castle to cut some straight pine trees, carrying them back on their shoulders as if they had been sticks. They quickly cut them into lengths, and stripped off the bark with the bill-hooks they always carry hung on their belts behind. The posts they set firmly at equal distances and the cross-bars between; then they stretched thick wire from top to bottom, fastened to strong screw eyes, which can be tightened year by year, if the wire slackens. Another journey was taken to the river bed for the immensely tall reeds, which were laid at regular intervals across the wires and fastened to them with osiers. The ends of the reeds they trimmed even, and the work was done. Wire does not sound romantic, but the reeds hide it, and the vine covers the whole in a season, and forms a level canopy of green. One need not be rich in the south to sit in the shade of a hundred pergolas.

There was never any work Pietrino did not willingly undertake. Once, in order to make an arbour of chestnut boughs for the arrival of some friends, he and Ferruccio worked till dark and then were back next morning at four, and seemed thoroughly to enjoy the rush.

While in most things Pietrino is a hard, level-headed, practical man, we have often been astonished by his superstitions, which every now and then show themselves. His belief in witchcraft I have already described, but perhaps it is not so surprising as his other superstitions. One day that we were sowing double stocks, he gravely told us that they would all come up single unless we sowed them on

Holy Thursday. Of course, he said we must do as we liked—we were the *Padrone*—but he evidently thought we were very foolish. He also holds to all the old pagan beliefs in the influence of the moon, and would never dream of changing his wine at the waning moon.

Bere il vino, e lasciar andare l'acqua al molino.

All through the uncertain Spring everyone had been anxious about the coming vintage, the most important crop of the year. The weather never seemed quite right; it would rain just as the vines had been covered with sulphate of copper, and wash it away, so that the peasants were ever wandering through the vineyards weighed down by a big can, their face and hands and clothes stained a blue green. Then the sun always shone directly after the rain, and the people gloomily predicted that every leaf in the country-side would be burnt. We all felt very depressed, and, like so many augurs, watched the skies. But the vines did the unexpected, and by the first days of October the bunches of black and white grapes looked in magnificent condition. How often had Ferruccio not pinched those under our windows, and given them a smile of satisfaction.

"It will be a splendid vintage notwithstanding our fears," we said to Pietrino.

"Things are well enough," he said, looking crossly at the great clusters of luscious grapes, "but they might be better; the wine, though plentiful, will be too thin to get drunk on."



THE VINTAGE

It was a brilliant day that we started for the vintage, windless and warm, yet with an autumn nip in the air. Everybody was in the highest spirits, and the hills echoed with the sound of many voices, of laughter and songs. Assunta and her family, surrounded by tubs and baskets, awaited us at the *podere* which overhangs the high road. Set in between a rough strip of spinney and a chestnut wood, with a stream racing through, it is the most delightful of their three farms. It was Assunta's dowry. Originally only a rough wood full of stones and brambles, old Montan had set to work to bring it into cultivation; he pulled the hillside down into terraces year by year, and planted all the vines, of which there was a great variety. They showed us the "*buon amico*, or good friend, with large loose bunches of purple-black grapes; the *Trebbiano*, brilliant yellow with the sunny side stained a deep brown; the *uva grassa*, a dull yellow-green; and the lovely *occhio di Pernice*, or Partridge eye, of a light pink with ruby lines." Some were caught up in festoons between the maples, the branches often escaping into the crown of the tree; others were trained forward on posts, not unlike the hops in Kent.

It was the busiest yet most peaceful day we had ever spent; each one had his allotted task: Ferruccio and Enrico, barefooted, swung themselves up into the maples and dropped great clusters of grapes into our baskets. Assunta passed in and out among us collecting the fruit, and strode down the hill erect as any Arab woman, carrying the heavy baskets on her

head as if they had been feathers, then knelt, erect still from the hips, while Pietrino lifted her burden down. He appeared the happiest person there, sitting among his tubs looking rapturously at his grapes, and sorting out the finest ones for the first quality of wine, as if they had been precious stones. Everyone ate steadily ; the family kept bringing us bunches of grapes which they declared to be different and better than the last, and stood there until we had delivered an opinion. This did not prevent us all from sitting down to an immense *marmite* of bean soup and a liberal supply of sausages made of rice and chopped meat. As for little Marietta, she only cut the grapes to eat, and, oblivious of the merriment she caused, sat solemnly munching her lapful of fruit, her basket piled high by her side. Sitting in a framework of large vine leaves, she looked like something born of the sun ; her cheeks were ruddy as a mountain-grown apple, and her hair a tawny gold. Behind, a merry-faced boy of three, crowned with a wreath of grapes, thrust his head through the vine-trellis, laughing at her.

The generosity of our hosts was overwhelming ; they filled baskets of the best grapes to take home, and cut immense sprays to hang over our doors, and so have a supply of raisins during the winter months. My husband, carrying the biggest branch, which bore about twenty bunches of fruit, across his shoulders, and big bunches in his hand, looked like another Joshua from the promised land. Assunta's donkey was already laden with the spoils from the

vineyard, but fortunately she spied an ox-cart coming along the road on its way to Brunella, and hailed it with loud commands to give us a lift. There was just room among the tubs of grapes to place our baskets, while I climbed up by the driver, and my husband followed behind with his burden, accompanied by a troop of vintagers.

My driver, a youth of eighteen, with a face of an Etruscan on a vase, straight and clear chiselled features, long narrow almond eyes far apart, and straight black hair, entertained me with praises of his oxen—they really belonged to his *Padrone*. "My oxen," he said, "are the best in the country round; they are as fleet of foot as any horse; I have only to lash them so, and away they go along the road and astonish all the carters." But the rope he flung at them only produced a swish of their long tails that day, and we drove leisurely along watching the angry red sunset. It was a curious sensation sitting up so high above the little grey beasts, with only about an inch of board to sit on and as much to support a toe. I felt poised in space as if we were all part of the mosaic vaulting of *Santa Costanza* in Rome. The heavily-built ox-cart, with wheels that a child might have fashioned, full of tubs of grapes, seen in the little circular Mausoleum, belongs to Italy of to-day. In another corner of the mosaic the cart has reached the winepress, and a barefooted Roman is treading the grapes in an immense vat, just as the Tuscan peasants are doing

in Benozzo Gozzoli's fresco at Pisa, and just as they do in the out-of-the-way parts of the country, where they are still delightfully uncivilised.

"Oh, we wash our feet well," Pietrino had said to us; "even our legs we wash, and with soap too, *si davvero Signora.*"

The chief business of the year being in full swing these October days, the Brunellese were very busy and important. A reeking smell of must pervaded the town, and every big space of inns, private houses, shops, and farms were full of great vats and barrels, and men and children stood over wine-stained tubs pressing out the juice with long poles. Brisk bargaining was going on in the *piazza* between the vendors of grapes and the citizens who, possessing no land, yet wished to make their own wine; and all the peasants were trying to persuade the incredulous burghers that every basket of grapes had hailed from the same coveted and sunny hill-side. A hundred pounds of grapes for under one penny a pound, and of the best quality too, sounds like a gift and not like trade; yet the peasants are often glad to sell their grapes on these terms in years of plenty.

Cesare, who during other months of the year is a horse-dealer, had a railway truck of grapes for sale which had come from near Modena; we declined it, having no proper place for the making of wine.

"But why bother about a *tinaia*?" said Cesare; "why not make it in the drawing-room; your *Sala*

is so big that you would never feel the inconvenience of the vats. We have to use the back part of our shop, where my wife cooks, whenever she can get away from her customers."

One day we went to Pietrino's other *podere*, where a further lot of grapes had been gathered and was being made into wine in the small farmhouse, which serves the Romena family for their *villeggiatura* during the summer months. The vineyards lie on a steep slope in a narrow gorge of the valley above the river, where Enrico hears the otter's shrill call as he fishes through the night. The house, clinging uneasily to the hillside, seems only prevented from slipping down by the firm, well-beaten threshing-floor which juts out, forming a delightful terrace. A small heap of corn was still lying at one corner, a flail and the wicker basket with which they sift it.

The austere little grey stone house had put on a festive appearance in honour of the wine-god. In the kitchen a cauldron was seething over a huge wood fire, and the light flickered across a mound of Indian corn piled high in the corner of the room. The small arcaded entrance was festooned with choice bunches of black grapes kept for the *governo* or strengthening of the wine, and white grapes for the *vin santo*; and sliced figs and mushrooms and crimson pats of tomato preserve lay drying in the sun on rush baskets.

Opening out on to the threshing-floor was a deep, cavernous cellar, which gave out a pungent smell of

must into the warm air. As my eyes grew accustomed to the half-darkness a line of vats showed dimly, and out of the biggest vat emerged the figure of Enrico. Clad only in a shirt and pair of trousers tucked up as far as they would go, he slowly and steadily stamped the seething grapes, lifting each time a crimson-stained leg. The glow of health was on his olive skin, his eyes shone, and his nostrils dilated with the toil and the fumes from the fomenting grapes.

Now be my song of Bacchus, nor forget¹
His bosky thickets and the fruit that decks
The tardy olive.

Come, Lenæan! come,
Lord of the winepress, Father of the vine!
For now is nature laden with thy boons,
And by thy bounty all the joyous earth
With grape-clad autumn teems, and brimming vats
Foam with the vintage.

Come, Lenæan! come,
Lord of the winepress, Father of the vine!
Strip off thy buskins, bare thy comely feet,
And plunge with me into the purple must.

Pietrino uncorked the bottom of one of the vats, and a pale crimson wine gushed out, frothing and hissing, into a tall jar. But while we drank a *Brindisi* to the family and their vintage, Enrico never relaxed his methodical treading, and smiled

¹ "The Georgics of Virgil," translated into English verse by Lord Burghclere. (John Murray, 1905.)

and nodded as we praised his perseverance. Then Assunta appeared with bottles of their best and oldest white wine ; again and again they would have had us fill our glasses ; but at last we made excuse to go out and watch the sunset, and, looking stealthily round, like so many culprits, we poured the contents of our glasses as libations to Bacchus among the vines.

It was many weeks before the scent of wine ceased to greet us at every turn. One day that we passed the Romena house in Brunella, Assunta, who was rolling out her odd-looking *pasta* for supper, called us in for a talk. Suddenly Pietrino's head appeared through a trap-door in the floor, and he beckoned us to follow him down the ladder into the cellar to hear the seething of his new wine. Assunta, with her usual impetuosity, threw down her rolling-pin and hurried off next door to buy a pennyworth of candle, but when she returned we were already standing in the bowels of the earth.

"Listen," cried Pietrino, his small eyes dancing and blinking, his bushy beard unusually unkempt and tangled, "listen, *Signori*, how well it boils ; do you hear ? Ah ! it is real music to me—better than Mario's flute," he added, with a chuckle.

And we were made to put our ear to each great barrel, while Assunta struggled with a candle which would not stand upright.

It will be gathered from this account of vintaging

that the making of wine is as simple as a great deal of the native agriculture. But if you read the vintaging chapter in "Italian Sketches," by Mrs Ross, you will know exactly how wine is made in good orthodox, Tuscan fashion, and it will dispel from your mind the impression that the making of wine is very like the mixing of a pudding. Even in our primitive valley there are proprietors who follow a more scientific method: they discard grape stalks—passing the grapes through a machine before they drop into the big vats—and do not look to the full moon for the success of their brew.

Everything is changing and on the road of progress; that summer was the last to see Enrico treading out the wine. Wearying of the domestic economy and the general discomfort of life at home, he elected to go into service at a neighbouring seaport; and then Ferruccio's mind began to work.

Slowly but steadily the world creeps into the valley: a tunnel is being made for another railway line, and scarlet posts for an electric current start up from an arcadian landscape; bridges span the rivers, hideous iron erections like the worst type of cheap railway bridge; and engineers fly about on motor bicycles. Ferruccio saw all this, as he went about his daily tasks in the fields, and he too began to weary. Then Enrico came back from the town in his best Sunday clothes, and met him in his rags leading the cows out to feed on the hillside. He talked of the doings in the town out there by the

sea, and jingled his pennies in a very grown-up fashion. He had to work like a black, it is true, making chestnut-cake at dawn to be sold in his master's shop, and carrying barrels of wine to the top storeys of high houses for the rest of the day. An Italian shopkeeper is sure to get every ounce of work out of him for the eighteen shillings a month and the food he gives him. But Enrico was happy "to see the world," to be able to buy a halfpenny cigar whenever he wanted to, and swagger about with the sailors. He needed no longer to ask his parents to untie the family stocking every time he wanted a new bootlace.

Montan looks sadly on at these innovations. He has worked for his grand-children all his life, and, now that he is old, and at any moment might be prevented from working any more, the boys disperse. Marietta and bright-eyed Beppino still follow the cows; I see them at their games while the cows search for grass among the rock and irises. But soon Beppino will be sighing for a cap with a gold band and life on a station platform, and the terraces, which Montan has carved out of the hillside, will become like so many of the vineyards about us, neglected and grass-grown.

Every day there were fresh signs of the change coming over Ferruccio. He no longer talked with enthusiasm of "*i miei campi*"—my fields; and when he came to help in the garden he scamped his work in every direction. Warnings were useless, and at last we told him that we had had enough of his idleness

and stupidity. "I too have had enough," Ferruccio had said, as he threw his head up and stalked down the hill. That was our last sight of him; biding the moment for something to turn up, he went back to the daily routine in the fields, and still keeps well out of our way. At the same time there was a stupid money misunderstanding with the father, which all in a minute changed the whole aspect of the man towards us, revealing pent-up ill-will and the greed he had hitherto well disguised. Our last sight of Pietrino was of a man transformed. Menacing and angry-eyed, he stormed into the castle one night, and showered upon us a volley of Homeric curses, upon our family, upon our servants, who had starved him and his son with crusts of bread as their only meal, and everyone who belonged to us. All the way down stairs again he continued his maledictions, and as the door closed upon him the muffled tones of fresh curses reached us. The strain had been relieved by laughter, for looking round I had caught sight of Adelina interposing her stout little person in front of her *Padrone*, imagining that she could thus save him in the event of Pietrino using a knife. But, fortunately, Pietrino believes in the efficacy of curses.

So quickly can one pass in Italy from what one thought was friendly intercourse to bitter enmity. The Brunellese said it had happened because the Romenas were common peasants—*villani*. Our own impression was that we had been too easy-going and treated them differently to what they

were accustomed. Also the modern Italian is not used to be trusted ; but, fortunately, there are many left of the "old school," and many of the younger generation still unconsciously take *Galantuomo* for their motto. The further you get away into the hills, away from barter and commerce, the more straight are the people you have to deal with. Verga in two of his novels, "*I Malavoglia*" and "*Mastro Don Gesualdo*," has shown the peasant and the bourgeois in a state of evolution, and it is not a pleasant picture : the great car is driven forward by men eager for riches, and its relentless wheels crush down their struggling neighbours. Everything seems in a state of transition, and one looks uncertainly to the time when Italians will have emerged from the struggle into the light of prosperity and riches.

There is another point to be touched upon. Relations between English masters and their dependants in Italy are not always easy. The Englishman finds the foreigner horribly underpaid, and is ready to treat him better ; and plunged into the romance of the country it is sometimes difficult to be worldly wise. Then the Italian mistakes kindness for stupidity. He says : " Here we have fools to deal with, let us get as much as possible out of him," and the time comes when the "fool"—"*il minchione*"—draws the line and a storm bursts. In every case the old proverb shows its wisdom : " In Rome do as the Romans do."

At the time we felt as if our small world had come

to an end, for the Romena family had become very much a part of the Fortezza life. But old Montan still remains our faithful ally, his hands are busy, his mind at ease; and the *Pomarino* works on happy as ever. *Arcades ambo.*

XXI

MEZZADRI PEASANTS

Loda il monte e tieniti al piano

THE *Padroni* of our friends at Liccione a generation ago were themselves poor peasants, but they now belong to that much-envied group known as the "*Americani con soldi*." Their main capital is invested in a flourishing shop at a neighbouring seaport, and some four hundred pounds were spent in buying the fine old castle standing solitary on the heights above groves of fruitful olives. It is one of the few castles about here which has not fallen entirely to ruin. It stands on a projecting spur between two valleys, is approached by an avenue of old ilexes, and protected on the north by a box hedge about twelve feet high. The peasants live in the castle and the proprietors in a comfortable modern dwelling below. Two sons live most of the year in a "*Palazzo*" close to the family shop at the seaport, while another stays with the old father, and keeps one eye on the peasants and one on little birds. We constantly meet him on the hillside, a jovial, elderly bachelor attired in brown corduroy and feathered hat. In their vineyard he has built a little pink pavilion, which he laughingly calls the club of Liccione, and here the villagers

gather with him on feast days to play a game of *Briscolo* or *Scopa*. In the summer-time they pull their table out of doors and dine and play *al fresco*.

The proprietors thrive, and, comparatively speaking, so do the peasants. There is money from the shop to spend on the land. The *mezzadri*, it is true, give their labour free, and, if an animal dies, bear the half of the loss, but the working capital of the land is put out by the owner; they live rent free, pay no taxes, and divide with the *Padrone* half the profits of the farm, even to the wool off the few sheep which graze on the hill. If the crops fail, the *Padrone* is bound to see that they do not starve; anything he advances is put down as a debt, but no interest is charged, and the peasant pays back in kind when the good year comes round again. This, in outline, is the famous *metayer* system, described by Pliny the Younger, and which, with slight local modifications, is to be found in Umbria, Tuscany, and parts of the Romagna and of Northern Italy. It can only work where a variety of crops is grown: in the garden farms of Tuscany it flourishes, in the vast fields of Lombardy, or in the wide stretching olive groves of Apulia it would be impossible. There is now a pronounced movement against it by proprietors, who wish to go with the times, weary of the proverb which has ever been the guide of the peasant: "He who leaves the old road knows what he has left, but not what he may find." Also, now that the taxes are so high, the burden falls unfairly upon the shoulders of the landlord. The

gentlemen of the *Giunta* have an irritating way of levying taxes *a capriccio*. If the *Padrone* buys a new *baroccino*, or his wife wears an extra smart feather in her hat, they infer unusual prosperity for that year, and up go the taxes. If he improves his land, they use it as another pretext for an extra turn of the screw.

But the peasant, while he plods along leading a somewhat sunless life, at least has no burden of responsibility outside his family, and, if hard-working, he is sure of his daily bread. The scarcity of ready money causes a patriarchal system of barter and exchange such as existed in the days of Virgil. We still meet "the slow-paced ass," with its load of "oil or common fruit," which returns from town with ~~an~~ an indented mill-stone," or any other object wanted for the farm. This is even more the case in the south, where things move slowest of all.

The family of peasants at Liccione consists of a father and mother and eight children. As the eldest girl is seventeen and one boy is sixteen, they are just able to work the farm without extra labour. A number of children become a blessing to a peasant directly they begin to grow up, and during the vintage and the olive harvest even the small children work all day. But, like the artisan and bourgeois, they consider themselves cursed by Heaven if they have no male children. "Rather six boys than one girl," they say.

In the bare kitchen of Liccione, its windows fogged so that nothing of the magnificent stretch

of the Apennines was visible, its walls yellow with smoke, a great hole (an arrow shoot) for the general dirt of the house, I have felt more in touch with the spirit of family life than in many a beautiful palace or comfortable burgher's house. There is no *caff  * to tempt them away from their hearth, and work in the fields binds men and women together in a common bond. We generally arrive about three in the afternoon, when the evening meal, the inevitable bean soup, is boiling in the cauldron. I sit on a straight-backed bench in front of the fire, with some of the younger members of the family about me; in the next room, where the chestnuts are drying, the painter half sits, half lies on the floor, the only way in which he can get a view of the children tending the fire on the open hearth in the middle of the room. This room is very small, and has no chimney; if a little extra light or air is needed, one of the children unnails the window. In smoke and stuffiness, every door hermetically sealed, the peasants herd together during the winter evenings. Every particle of heat is thus collected, and seasons the chestnuts, which are laid out on laths across the rafters, after they have been beaten out of their prickly cases in thick linen bags. When they are thoroughly dry, they are shelled and taken to the mill to be ground into the finest of flour.

The first time we visited them this year, Matilde, the mother, instead of being in the fields, was sitting on the low stone seat inside the hooded recess of the kitchen chimney. Tomasino, a boy of under four, and

little Teresa, sat opposite her, with their toes in the ashes, peeling potatoes. Matilde leaned forward and fixed her dark eyes upon me, as she held a black-glazed plate on her upturned hand and supped a little weak broth out of it. Her face seemed unusually white, framed in the folded black kerchief, and seen against the smoked background of the recess.

"Have you been ill?" I asked.

"*Mamma mia*, have I been ill?" groaned Matilde, "I have been near to death. There was a day when I thought to call the priest, but, by the grace of our blessed Madonna, that evil was averted. My illness all happened in this way. One day I was left alone with the animals, all the family were gathering in the grapes, when that afternoon the cow calved before her time. *Misericordia!* what a struggle it was! and in the end I leant against the wall, feeling as if I were running round with the world. I have never felt well since that day; but what was the good of calling in our doctor?"—here she made the sign of lifting a bottle to her lips—"and I went out as usual to work, to dig and get fodder for the cattle. I don't know what our Madonna was doing, but soon after this another disaster happened. One evening as we all sat at supper, Gino, our neighbour who lives in the cottage a little further down the hill, came and called at the window, and said he wanted a word with my husband. We asked him to come in and have a plate of *minestra* with us, but he shook his head,

and there he stood on the steps outside. So my husband went out to him. Presently I heard a great row going on, and I looked out of the window and saw how angry Gino seemed. By the grace of the Madonna, he made a false step, and dropped his knife out of his shirt, and when the children saw that they laid hold of their *Babbo*, and dragged him back and bolted the door. All this confusion came about because, at the end of the summer, I had refused Gino's wife any more water from our well—it was getting very low and I feared for the cattle and for ourselves. When her husband returned from France, where he had been working all the summer and autumn, she related him a story as long as the devil's tail."

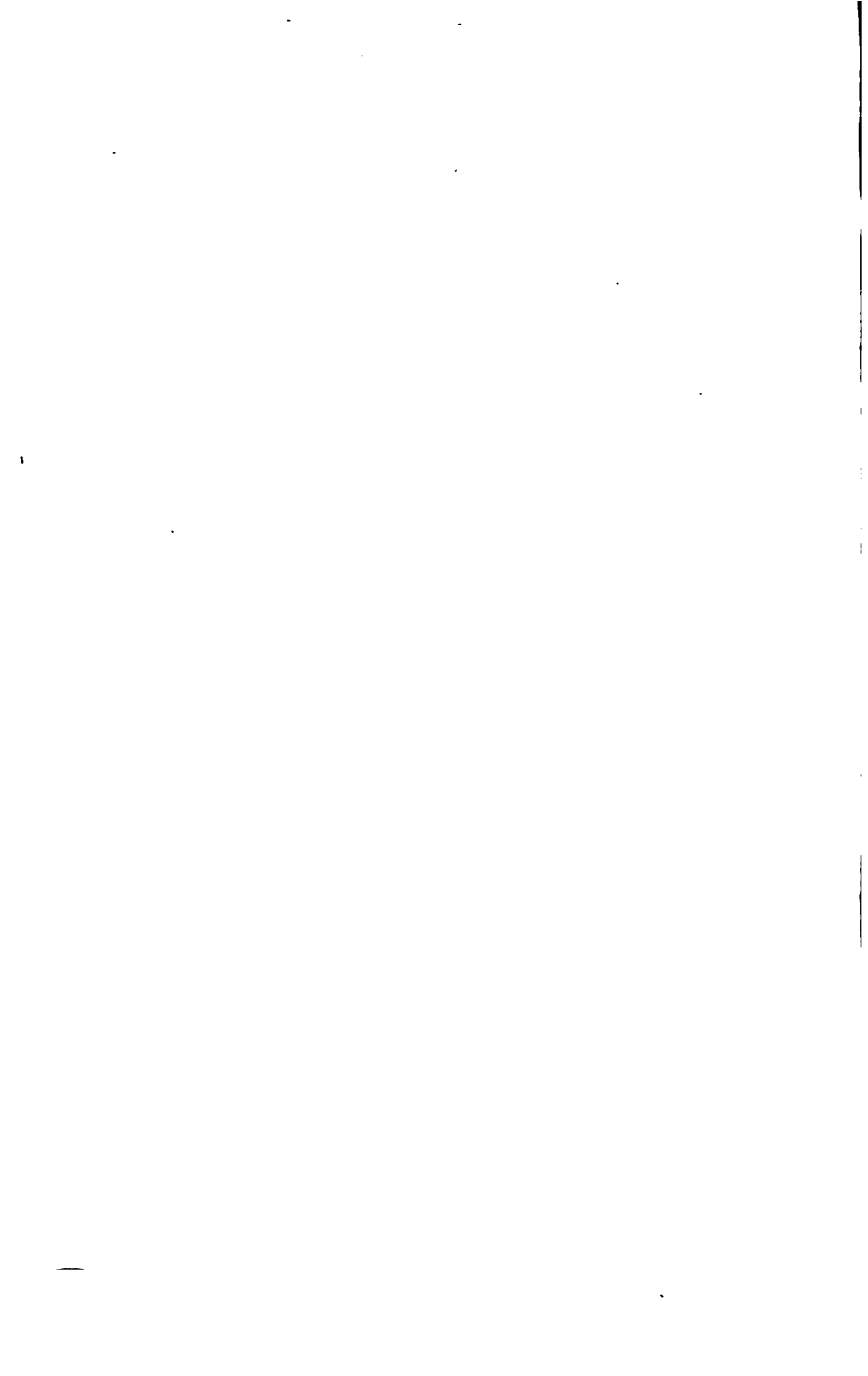
"*È una brutta chiaccherona*—an ugly chatterbox," broke in Tomasino, with great gravity.

I asked Matilde if her husband kept any arms.

"*O bella mia anima*" (she always calls me her beautiful soul), "he has knives of every quality and size; he kills the pigs for nearly all the butchers in the country-side. He has a gun too, which hangs by our bed." I saw it afterwards beneath a picture of the Madonna. "Well," continued Matilde, "it grew so bad at last that we sent for a doctor from the valley; he cut me about and sewed me up, and never cleaned the wound—so there I was, as bad as ever. Then came another doctor, brought by our *Padrone*, and he cut me again; but he wasn't such a blacksmith, and I got through all right. But, *bella mia anima*, it was ten lire for each operation,

DRIVING THE CHESTNUTS





and then there were the medicines and the cotton-wool. Oh, my pretty pennies, how they all rolled down the hill! It is true that the *Padroni* were very kind and gave me five *lire*. My man says it does not matter about the money so long as I get well, and we must just make a debt with the *Padroni*—*pazienza*; but I shall never be able to work in the fields again, the doctor says, and it nearly breaks my heart."

Matilde was full of desire for information that day; it was not often that she had time to settle down for a real talk. She asked me many things about our English land, which she confused with America, where her *Padroni* had traded.—How did we manage to live without oil? And, fancy, wine only being for the rich; and, oh! how delightful to pay so little for sugar. Why, we could have a feast every day, and, of course, we were not such *minchione* (fools) to buy sugar here, where a *kilo* costs a day's work. But how did we *tirare avanti* (get on) without the Madonna—*poverini*, it must be hard. And why did we live by ourselves? Where were my husband's father and mother, and his brothers and their wives and children? I tried to explain our Northern ways of living. "*Che Dio le mandi un po' di bene*," she kept saying, as if she thought we were in much need of help in our domestic solitude.

The children seemed everywhere, and, with apparent unconcern, alternately received the blessings and curses of their mother. "*Spazza il naso del tuo*

fratello," she would shout in a stentorian voice to an elder girl, and obediently she wiped her brother's nose on her skirt. Then to another: "What are you doing there, you little ugly pig? may God send you a hundred bastards." And having delivered herself of these outbursts, a bright smile would break all over her face. By the manner of the children towards her I saw that her quickly spent anger never passed beyond hard and sometimes strange words. Personally, I have never come across or heard of a case of an ill-treated Italian child.

Teresa, a perfect little housewife of twelve, with big, gentle eyes and clear-cut features, was the cook of the family. She generally went about her duties with an importunate baby on one arm who refused to go to anyone else. It was eight months old, and they fed it on bean soup and red wine; milk it disliked, they said. Teresa that afternoon was busy making *castagnacci*, which she said was not food for gentlefolks, but very good all the same. She mixed the sweet chestnut flour with a little water, and then baked it in the ashes in circular shapes made of terra-cotta, and the cake came out with the impression of a chestnut leaf on either side, which have been put inside the shapes to prevent the cake from burning.

Teresa told me about their meals: on week days the chief meal is in the evening, always bean soup with potatoes; the pangs of hunger are satisfied at odd times of the day with *fogaceti*—tough scones of maize flour, or else with chestnut cakes.

"On feast days it is quite different," said Teresa, and I waited to hear the varied bill of fare. "You see, as we do not go to the fields, we eat our bean soup all together at mid-day, and our *fogaceti* in the evening."

During our conversation Fiorellino, a boy of eight, was writing out his exercises, sitting on the hearth with his back to the fire, and using the bench as a table. I watched his troubled face and the way he gripped his pen like a spade. None of the children have been to the communal school, as Matilde could never spare them for so many hours of the precious daylight. But every evening she sends them to the old shoemaker in the village, who teaches them to read and write and do simple arithmetic. It costs her a franc a month for each child; and however little for the schoolmaster, it means a deprivation of something for the mother, and shows that education is beginning to be appreciated by the unlettered peasant.

The children were all intelligent and bright. Perhaps their scanty use of books only makes them use their wits the more, and develops their powers of observation. I often wonder how they learn their good manners. Teresa was always very upset whenever Tomasino passed in front of me, which he did very often, tumbling over my knees, and each time he had to listen to her little sermon on politeness. But these were lapses when Tomasino's thoughts ran on the cat's tail, for he had all the instincts of playing the host. Whenever I arrived

he would run up saying that the *fogaceti* were just cooking, and would I not have one to take back to my *fante*? He is brimful of character, and is referred to by his sisters as "*quel curioso*." Sitting there on the hearth he entertained me with a fund of anecdotes about "the hen, the donkey, and the goose, who all went to the fair at Canossa, what they bought there, and all their adventures."

When one of his sisters also wanted to tell the story, he marched off in a huff, his clothes in a very unstable condition, and was only with difficulty persuaded to resume his seat and his story.

"Tomasino, will you come with me to Brunella, and I will give you a toy cart and a gun?" I asked. Tomasino gravely shook his head.

"I like better to stay in my own house."

"Shake hands with me, then, and I will give you some sweets."

He fixed his round black eyes upon me and very deliberately replied: "Give me the sweets first and I'll give you my hand."

But when I produced some caramels done up in twisted paper, his affections sprang towards me. "*O tu sei la mia amorosa*," he cried.

After that he confided to me all his hopes for the coming *Befana*.

"I have asked her to bring me some oranges, some sugar, and a *salame*, but who knows whether the sausage will get into my stocking," and he stuck out a sturdy leg and examined it critically.

"Where do you put your stocking, Tomasino?"

"Why, by the fire, of course; the *Befana* comes down the chimney on a white horse when we are all in bed, and we put a plate of bran for the poor horse to eat, because he has been travelling all night and is very hungry. Shall I sing you the song to the *Befana*?

*"Riverita Signora Befana,
Dagli occhi cristallini e la collana di perla
Riverita Signora Befana."*¹

"And would you like to hear the *Pater Noster* we say at Christmas-time?" asked Tomasino. But this proved a tax on his memory, and Teresa, much to his chagrin, had to assist him. They went at such a pace that I had to make them repeat it several times before I could write it down:

*"Pater Noster di Natale
Beato chi l'impara,
L'impara San Martino,
Lo scrive San Pellegrino,
San Pellegrino lo porta in Cielo*

¹ In Renaissance times there used to be processions through the streets carrying guys of the three kings, the people followed blowing trumpets. The black king seems to have caught the popular fancy and degenerated into the mythical old woman of the Epiphany, who brings presents for the good children and charcoal for the naughty ones. There is a legend about an old woman who was sweeping out her house when the kings passed. They looked in at the window and told her to come with them and see the *Bambin Gesù*. She said she would when she had finished her sweeping, but then, of course, it was too late, and she is still riding about on her broomstick looking for the *Bambin Gesù*. But I have never found any good account of the myths.

Per veder chi c'era :
C'erano le tre Diane,
Che suonavan le tre campane,
Da tanto che suonavano
Le corde si schiantavano.
Prende là per una viottoletta
C'era la Santa Colombetta.
Santa Colombetta, ove vai tu ?
Vado a battezzare il Bambin Gesù,
Con bianca pezzola
E senza fasciola,
Col nome d'argento
Che vale cinque cento,
Cento cinquanta.
La pecorella canta,
Canta il gallo, risponde la gallina.
Madonna ricciolina
S'affaccia alla finestra
Con tre corone in testa.
Passan tre fanti
Con tre cavalli bianchi,
Bianca la sella,
Bianca la donzella,
Bianco il parasole.
Gesù ci manda il sole !
Il sole verrà,
Gesù lo manterrà."¹

¹ The Pater Noster of Christmas—blessed is he who learns it. San Martino learns it, San Pellegrino writes it, San Pellegrino carries it to heaven, to see who was there. There were the three Dianas, who were ringing the three bells, and from their great ringing the bell-ropes broke. Then he went by a side path. There was Santa Colombetta. "Santa Colombetta, where art thou going?" "I am going to baptise the Infant Jesus, with a white napkin, and without swaddling clothes, with a silver name [on a medal], which is worth five hundred and a hundred and fifty." The lamb sings, the cock sings; the hen answers. Curly-haired Madonna comes to the window, with

Just then Stella, the eldest girl, came in from washing the clothes in a mountain stream; her cheeks were flushed with health, and her brown hair fell over her forehead in big waves. Although only dressed in shabby working clothes, there was a delightful coquetry in the way she had twisted the red kerchief at the back of her head, so that it formed a frame to her laughing face, and folded another across her chest, the ends kept down by a blue cotton apron. Her gentle face has the attractiveness of a wild deer. Although kind and sisterly to the crowd of little people about her, I felt that Stella had begun to realise that, as far as she was concerned, the worry of them was not worth it. The baby seemed to feel her aloofness, and screamed for Teresa directly she tried to nurse it. Stella has just awoke to the feeling that life spreads out before her, and she awaits her *damo*. I asked her if I should see her again this year at the carnival dances. She flushed up, and cast a side glance at her mother, who laughed. "It all depends if old Peppita can take her," answered Matilde, and Stella heaved a sigh of expectation. I reminded her how I had watched her dance last year, and how Peppita had danced the *Monferrina* for me.

All the Sundays through Carnival Brunella is alive with music. From the street the merry

three crowns on her head. Three children pass, on three white horses. White is the saddle, white the maiden, white the parasole. Jesus send us sunshine. The sunshine will come. Jesus will maintain it.

dancers can be seen in the dimly-lit rooms on the ground floor, ribbons and swags of greenery hanging across the low-vaulted ceiling, and the musicians, on their raised stand, playing away for dear life. The dance strikes up, and just as the dancers are in full swing the music stops, and the *Maestro del Ballo* goes round to collect the halfpence from the men; then the music strikes up with renewed vigour, and all is motion again. I had gone the round of the dances to find someone who could dance the national peasant dance called the *Monferrina*, which hails from the hills about Turin, but no one knew anything except a valse, and the still more popular mazurka. At last I came to a little wine shop at the foot of the castle hill, and found Stella whirling away in a crowd of peasants and carters. The classes keep very distinct; the burgher does not patronise the tavern dance of the *villano*, as he arrogantly terms the peasant or *contadino*. Stella came to my assistance, and laughing at my anxiety to see anything so antiquated as the *Monferrina*, called her chaperone. I discovered that Peppita, in her youth, had been a famous dancer, before the valse had been introduced into the valley, and that, notwithstanding her sixty years, she was very anxious to show off her talent. Peppita waved everyone aside imperiously, and we all made ourselves small against the walls. The mistress of the tavern, kicking off her wooden shoes, took her place, and two middle-aged men came forward as their partners. The quaint old tune struck up, and the dance began

very much like a Highland reel. When it came to Peppita's turn to step into the middle, "Look at me well," she called out in her brisk voice, "for I shall make your eyes fall out of your head," and mine did from pure delight. Her own enjoyment and sense of the importance of what she was about infected us all, and we stood breathlessly watching. Once started she was oblivious to anything around her, and led her partner a maddening chase; sometimes it appeared as if she would let him hold her, but she turned and tripped away to begin her tantalising game from the other side of the room. The impression ever was of a stout little woman in a bunched skirt, crimson stockings showing beneath its swirling folds, ever whirling, whirling, with hands on hips, intent upon the rhythmic circles of her dance.

"Oh, Stella, why do you not learn to dance the *Monferrina*," I said to her, as the figure of Peppita came before me, "that really is dancing."

Stella smiled, a little sorrowfully for me I thought, as she said, "*Ma signora! la mazurka è più di moda.*"

The afternoon slips away with these kindly folk, and it seems too soon when I hear the painter putting away his things next door. "*Buona sera*, come back quickly," says Matilde, and the children nod and smile.

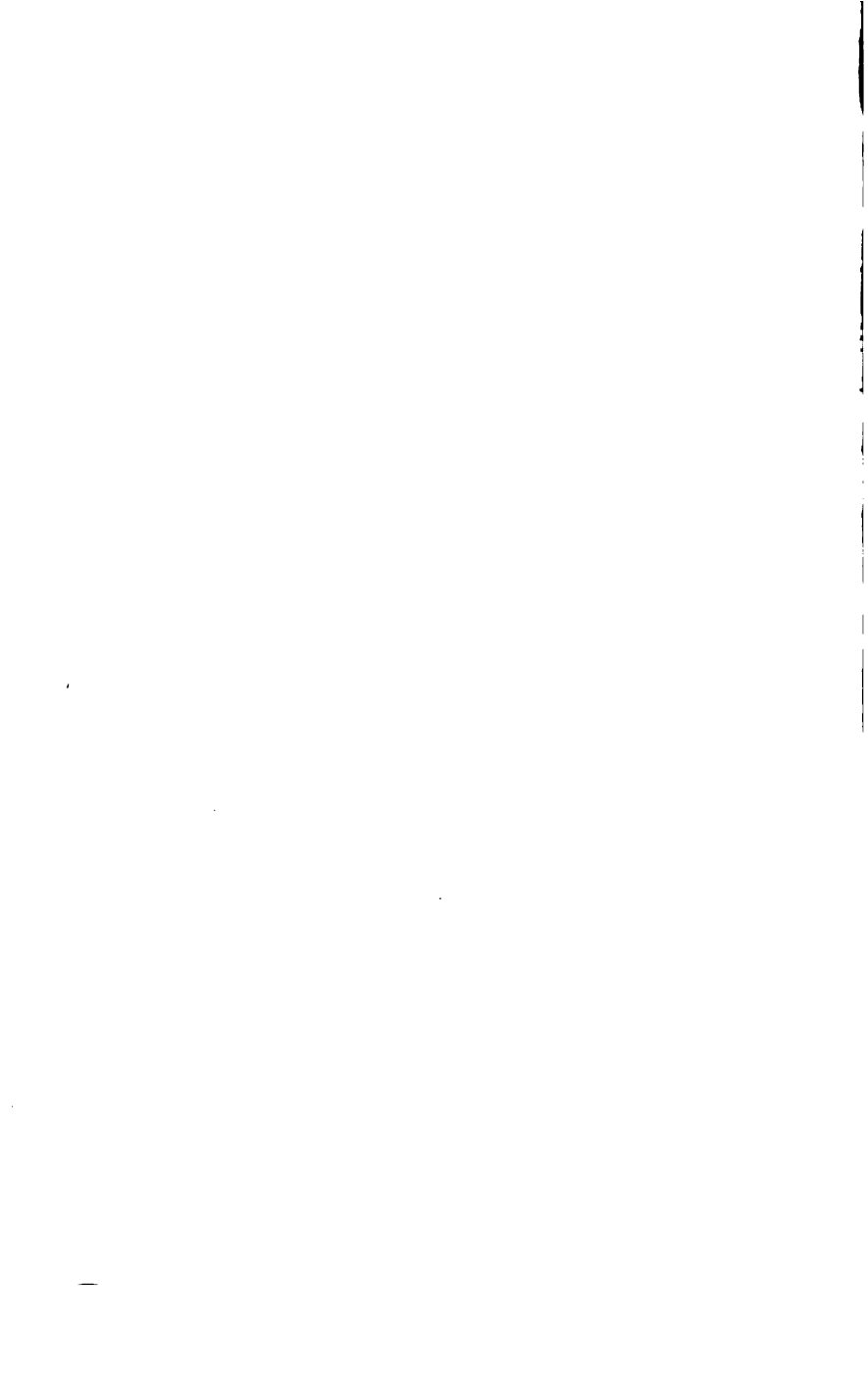
As we step outside on to the smooth grass between the ilex trees, a sense of indescribable peace steals upon the land. The day's work is drawing to a close.

A woman goes by carrying an osier basket of fodder on her head, her crimson skirt swinging in full folds as she moves; a white and a black lamb shamble behind. Presently a little flock of sheep hurry past, driven by two laughing children. Then slowly comes a wicker carriage full of dry chestnut leaves, drawn by a pair of white oxen up the steep track, just a basket set upon a wooden sledge, which must have been as familiar to Virgil as it is now in all the mountains and woodlands of Italy. Down below men are digging the last furrow; "the bullocks bring home the plough hanging from the yoke"; and there in the valley creak and groan "the wains of Ceres with their lumbering wheels." The peasants we see returning home gather round the hooded fireplace as night closes in, each one to a task: some will prepare the flame-coloured willow twigs "to curb the trailing vine"; others make baskets "of limber thorn"; while the young girls work at their wedding clothes, and the goodwife plies her shuttle across the web or spins a flaxen thread.

As we sit and watch the long shadows creep across the valley and the smooth waters of the river flowing swiftly hundreds of feet below, the smoke begins to rise from cottage roofs; and while the old world and the new are joining hands, a group of belated shepherd children pass along. They run across the grass in merry play, singing in shrill, joyous voices. They have twisted garlands of hellebore round their hips, and their



OXEN PLOUGHING



heads are crowned with leaves. In the still air the mountaineer's great sea - shell horn sounds from a further range of Apennine, and it seems like a call to the children to some woodland festival.

XXII

GUINIGI, THE PEASANT, TELLS US A FAIRY TALE

Qui ha lingua adorna può andar pertutto

UNTIL I came to live among the Italian people I followed the general belief that there were no fairy tales in Italy, and that the Italian child never entered in spirit those enchanted gardens and palaces guarded by dragons and inhabited by beautiful and unfortunate princesses. Many educated Italians are ignorant of the popular literature at their elbow—it does not interest them—and it is only by happy chance that the foreigner comes across it.

Two writers during the Renaissance set about collecting fairy tales and tales of love and enchantment. Giovan Francesco Straparola of Caravaggio, in the Milanese, published in Venice in 1550 the first European collection of fairy tales, "*Le Piacevoli Notti*," which seem to have been the origin of the more famous "*Contes de Fées*" of Madame d'Aulnoy.

The collection contains some stories in the vein of anecdote, others Boccaccian; and wedged in between them are nineteen genuine popular tales, some of them about very familiar people. There is a charming prince bewitched at birth into a pig, the classical goose which laid the golden egg, only in this case it

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is a doll which brings fortune to its kind mistress in a manner wholly Italian, and then we find the old friend of our childhood, Puss in Boots, which is said to have been invented by Straparola.

In 1637 there appeared in Naples, written in the Neapolitan dialect, another famous collection of fairy tales, called "*Il Pentamerone or Lo Cunto de li Cunti, ovvero Trattenemento de li Peccerille*," by Gianbattista Basile.¹ It is a first-class collection of real fairy tales, and has been made much use of by many writers, to mention only two—Lorenzo Lippi and Carlo Gozzi. In the "*Pentamerone*" we find many old favourites—Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast (only it is the other way round), the Sleeping Beauty, and again our friend Puss in Boots but in an altered form. The wealth of imagery in these stories betrays the meeting of Basile with eastern travellers and merchants in his various travels through Italy and the Levant; every page gives new and delightful similes clothed in flowery language, which breathe some of the atmosphere of the "*Arabian Nights*." This mixture of poetry and fantasy strikes a curious contrast with the pithy proverbs, unromantic particulars, and rather obvious jests which delight the modern Italian no less than

¹ Thirty out of the fifty stories were translated into English in 1850 by John Edward Taylor, and illustrated by George Cruikshank, which can safely be put into the hands of any child. I cannot say the same for the complete and very fine translation by Sir Richard Burton. When Basile gave the sub-title of "*Fun for the Little Ones*" to his "*Pentamerone*," he must have had strange ideas regarding the education of the juvenile mind.

they did his ancestors of the Renaissance. The stories which have passed into the literature of northern countries, while they have lost their wealth of language and expression, have gained a deeper sense of enchantment.

Straparola and Basile still belong to the home life of the Italian people. This I began to see on reading some of the popular tales collected by the late Signor Antonio de Nino from the shepherds and peasants of the Abruzzi. Among a host of other stories, he gives their version of Little Red Riding Hood, where the wolf becomes a hobgoblin, an *Orca*.¹ When Little Red Riding Hood discovers the fraud, she determines to escape, and makes use of an excuse in very Italian fashion to leave the room. The *Orca* gets out of bed to throw a rope out of the window to pull her up again, and she fastens a donkey on instead, and runs away, while the *Orca* is struggling with his load.

One day when Adelina caught sight of the illustrations of Cruikshank in my English edition of the "Pentamerone," she cried out, "*Madonna mia!* why you have got our Italian fables." That particular

¹ In the preface of many collections of fairy stories, both English and German, there is often a learned dissertation upon the groundwork of many of these tales, which are to be found in every country. Sir George Webbe Dasent, in his "Popular Tales from the Norse," points out how the Master Thief, and the Norse tale of Big Peter and Little Peter, have their parallel in the third fable of the first night of "*Le Pacevoli Notti*," by Straparola. The same traits come into a Sanscrit story, the "*Hitopadesa*," translated by Professor Max Müller, and is also reminiscent of the "*Rhapsinitus*" in Herodotus.

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day I was laid up with a cold, and she brought her crochet work and settled herself on the window seat, saying, with an air of conviction, "*Padrona mia*, I am going to entertain you, and make you laugh; you will quite forget the cold in your head." She told me of the girl who fashioned a little husband to her own liking, all rosy and white, out of sugar and dough, of Cinderella, of Petrosinella, of the Golden Hair, and so through the gallery of old familiar faces, and many more besides. Often the stories were a little mixed; the beginning of one would get fastened on to the end of another, which, told in her inimitable way, only made them the more amusing. Nearly every heroine was endowed with the gift of combing jewels out of her hair, a practical touch which delighted her. The story of Puccia has its northern counterpart.

"You must know, *Padrona mia*, that on great feast days even the peasants make their soup of meat and rice for the midday meal, and Puccia had been left to look after the *pentola*. As it boiled away over the fire it smelt so good that she could not resist tasting some of the meat; then she ate a little more, and then she ate it all. Puccia was as lazy as she was greedy, but she was also very cunning; she dropped an old shoe into the *pentola*, and left it to boil with the rice. Her mother came home at that minute, and discovered the fraud, and called out for an *Orca* to carry away her tiresome daughter, who was always making her angry. It happened that a merchant passed by who was in

search of a wife. 'Oh, take this girl,' said the mother, 'she is a wonderful worker, and can spin a whole house full of flax in no time.' The merchant did not notice anything, and went away with his prize—indeed, he looked as happy as my *Babbo* when he has just bought himself a new barrel of wine. I cannot tell you why, but the first three tasks the Fates did for her, and then, as the merchant kept filling the house with flax to be spun, the Fates began to think what they could do to stop him. Three different days a different old woman appeared and asked for alms. When he saw them, the merchant longed to know how any one could become so ugly, and as politely as possible begged each to tell him. 'Because I was made to spin all day long when I was young,' was the answer. 'O dear,' thought the merchant, 'better have fewer roast chickens to eat and a pretty wife to look at than be rich and have a wife with a face like a stone quarry.' So he forbade Puccia ever to touch a spindle again. She had real luck, for she lived like a lady for the rest of her days."

"And she did not deserve it," I said.

"*Ma cara lei*," answered Adelina, looking very wise, "as far as I have seen the world, and I am nearly twenty, bad people always come to a good end; it is destiny. Yes, this story is very true to life."

A minute later she had an idea: "I will fetch Guinigi next Sunday. He can tell about all sorts of fantastic people, and he is so funny—*un vero buffo*

GUINIGI TELLS US A FAIRY TALE 325

di teatro—indeed, he has often played the part of funny man in Brunella when a company of players has come without a *buffo*. As children we used to besiege him in the streets, until he had told us a story."

Her words recalled a summer's night when, returning home after a long moonlight walk in the chestnut woods, we came to a village. All had seemed deserted and asleep, only our footsteps echoed on the flagged street, when suddenly out of the gloom of an arched recess a whole world of people was revealed sitting round the story-teller.

We waited for Guinigi one wintry afternoon in company with Ulisse, his daughter, and the Signora Fausta. As he came into the room bowing his stately, tall figure towards the company, I felt that I was receiving a Marchese of the old school rather than a peasant by profession and a comedian by choice. He had donned his best black clothes, he held a round felt hat in his hand, and his face had just emerged from the Sunday shave. *Reveriti Signori, servo suo*, he said as he took his place by the fire in a tall-backed armchair. But with all his dignity he was evidently a whimsical character, and had a merry eye. Although Guinigi kept saying, with a reassuring smile, that we were "only to command him," a story he refused to tell us. Twenty years ago he knew these stories, it was true, but now people were so sensible, and children knew a great deal more than their grandparents, and would not listen to tales about magicians,

witches, and were-wolves which had never existed. "*Benedetto Dio!* how clever people are nowadays," said the old man.

"Oh!" exclaimed Adelina, "how can you say so! You used to tell me about the Magic Horse, the White Dove, and the Three Fates when I was fourteen, and *I* am not as ancient as thirty."

The more we pressed him, the more he swore by the heads of his grandchildren that he had forgotten every solitary tale; but if we liked, he would run home and fetch a book called "The Hundred and One Nights." He had a copy which he had bought forty years ago at a country fair.

We all looked crestfallen, and Ulisse whispered in my ear: "*abbiamo fatto fiasco*, he thinks that we have brought him here to laugh at him."

The old man sat there silently, sipping his wine and eyeing us narrowly. Then suddenly leaning forward on the arm of his chair, he began in a stentorian voice:—

"It was in the year 1482 that a great king called his son to him one day and told him that he wished him to marry and that he must begin to look about him for a wife. His son answered that he was quite happy as he was, and did not want to be worried with a woman.

"'But,' said the king, 'marry you must; pushed to it by love or driven to it by jealousy, you will one day be obliged to take a wife.'

"'Very well,' said the young prince, 'if what you say is true, let us get the business over as

quickly as possible. Let us send an embassy to find the most beautiful and the best woman in the world.'

"So an ambassador was chosen, and, taking plenty of golden *marenghi* and a good sword, he mounted a horse and started off on his journey. He travelled by day and he travelled by night; he suffered from cold and he suffered from hunger, for there was no one to care for his golden *marenghi*. Then he passed over the mountains and came to a forest of beeches, where he heard the roar of terrible wild beasts. He was so frightened that he climbed up into a tree; then, remembering his good sword, he came down again, mounted his horse, and cut his way through, and went on his way down the mountain. Presently in the middle of a chestnut wood he saw a light burning. He looked through the window of a tiny hut and saw an old woman weaving; click, clack, went her shuttle, and not another sound was to be heard. He tapped at the door and she came out and welcomed him, for she was a good old soul. He was very cold and hungry, but when he had warmed himself by the big fire and eaten some *castagnacci*, and had drunk some *vinello*, he really felt as comfortable as a dish of *maccheroni*. The old goody was very anxious to know why he had come all that way, and as she seemed a wise goody, he told her.

"'Now, surely,' she said, 'the Saints have been kind to you, for you have come to the right door. I can show you a maiden who is white as a heifer,

plump as a capon, and beautiful as the Madonna herself—a real eye of the sun. Also she is as good as a newly christened child who has just spat out the devil. If you wait here this night, you will see her come to the wood at dawn to gather faggots.'

"Sure enough at dawn came Gianchinetta, and ran to salute the old mother; but, when she saw the man with her, she fled away up the hill and hid in the wood.

"'Gianchinetta, Gianchinetta,' cried the goody, 'do not be afraid; here is a young cavalier who seeks a wife for his master. Would you not like to be a lady and wear a silk gown, and eat roast chicken and white bread for the rest of your days?'

"'Ah!' cried Gianchinetta, just peering out from behind a tree, 'a husband is not for poor girls like me. You are making fun of me.'

"'No, no,' said the ambassador, 'take me to your parents and we will settle the whole matter.'

"Gianchinetta ran away through the wood as quick as she could, with the cavalier in hot haste and the old woman following as fast as she could. When she got home, they began to scold her for not bringing any faggots, but just then the cavalier arrived and put everything to rights, when he gave them a handful of his golden *marenghi*. Gianchinetta had a step-mother who was simply hideous, ugly as a mortal sin, and wicked as the devil himself; and she had a daughter who also was as ugly as a mortal sin, and they both led the old father a terrible life: he dared not blow his nose without their permission.

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She also had a brother called Balmier who loved her dearly. When they heard the proposal of the king's ambassador, they all stood there in astonishment, just as if they had seen the Madonna.

"Well, they began to prepare for the journey, and Gianchinetta was sent to school for a fortnight to be educated. And then they were all ready to start, and Gianchinetta was dressed in a gown of silk, with jewels round her neck, and the others had on the clothes which they wore at the Sunday Mass. The old father stayed at home to mind the cattle and the sheep. The ambassador, who was a very polite man, asked the step-mother whether she would like to travel by land or by sea; she thought a minute, and then answered 'by sea.' For she was a very cunning woman—*proprio furba*—and, oh! how ugly she was! So the cavalier went down to the sea-coast and arranged with some sailors to take them, and they all went on board. One day while Gianchinetta was sitting on the poop with her step-mother and her step-sister, and the ambassador was busy in his cabin with his state papers, the sailors at the oars began to call out in a loud voice:—

*O! Gianchinetta, O! Gianchinetta!
Coprite quel bel volto
Che non possiamo navigar.¹*

"'What do the sailors say?' asked Gianchinetta.

"'They say, my child, that you must take off your

¹ I cannot describe the rhythmic way in which Guinigi slowly chanted the verses which he brought into his tale. The sailors say: "Cover that beautiful face, for we no longer are able to row."

jewels or else we shall all be drowned,' answered the step-mother.

*O! Gianchinetta, O! Gianchinetta!
Coprite quel bel volto
Che non possiamo navigar.*

" 'What do they say now?'

" 'They say, my child, that you must take off your clothes or else we shall all be drowned.'

" After a little while the sailors began again :—

*O! Gianchinetta, O! Gianchinetta!
Coprite quel bel volto
Che non possiamo navigar.*

" 'What can they want now, since I have but my shift,' asked poor Gianchinetta.

" 'They say, my child, that we must throw you into the sea,' and without another word they dropped her overboard.

" Then the step-mother dressed her own daughter in the clothes and jewels of Gianchinetta. But fine feathers did not make a fine bird ; her face was like a bit of burnt shoe leather, her teeth stumps of trees, and her smile like the grin of an ass ; *brutta, brutta, brutta*, I cannot tell how ugly she was. And there she sat all stiffly set out in her finery.

" Now the wicked step-mother was careful to threaten Balmier that she would cut off his head if he ever said anything about what had happened, and, as his poor sister was dead, there was nothing to be done.

" When the ship arrived the young Prince, who

was now King, came down to the sea-shore with all his court to meet his bride. But when he saw the monster before him he could not understand, and neither for the matter of that could the ambassador, who kept puzzling his head what could have come over Gianchinetta. Turning to the step-mother, the King said: 'Your daughter is a perfect beauty, far lovelier than reported,' and then to himself he muttered, 'Ugly monkey, I shall never have anything to do with her. Whew! she shall sleep in her own bed.'

"The step-mother began to excuse her daughter, saying that the sea-air had spoiled her complexion, but that a little rest would soon restore her beauty.

" 'Oh, she is quite lovely enough,' said the King, 'you simply could not improve her,' and he lodged them in a house a long way from the palace, and sat down to think the matter out. One day the courtiers came to him and asked him why he did not make some use of Balmier, who idled about all day when he might be minding the geese. 'Oh, your Majesty,' said Balmier, 'I should so like to have something to do, for I am tired of living like a gentleman.'

"The royal geese numbered three thousand, and Balmier felt very proud to walk behind such a company, holding a stick like a band-conductor. He took them down to the sea-shore, but when he saw the waves he grew very sad and began to call his sister in a loud voice.

"Now, when Gianchinetta had been thrown over-

board, three enormous whales swam towards her, and were just going to eat her, when the youngest whale, who was a good-natured soul, said, 'No, let us keep her as a plaything; after all, she would not make much of a dinner for the three of us.'

"So they put great fetters on to her feet and wrists, and secured her by a heavy chain. That day, under the waves, she heard her brother calling to her; and, oh! how she longed to see him. She went to the whales and said to them, 'O, good friends, do let me go and see my brother, who is on the sea-shore and calls for me. Perhaps he is hungry and wants my help.'

"At first they were very angry at such an idea, but presently the good-natured whale said they could always pull her back, and so they let her swim to shore. Poor Balmier was very frightened when he heard about the whale and saw the big chain, and began to wonder what he could do, but Gianchinetta made him promise that on no account was he to mention their meeting, as the King would be sure to kill their step-mother and step-sister if he knew what they had done. Well, they played together by the sea-shore, and Gianchinetta combed out her lovely golden hair, and a whole heap of precious stones and pearls fell upon the sand, and Balmier put as many as he could into all his pockets. Then she felt the whales pulling at her chain, and she swam quickly away.

"Balmier was determined not to say anything about his sister, so imagine how frightened he was when,

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as they entered the town, the three thousand geese suddenly put up their heads and began to sing :—

*Oche, oche, siamo venu,
Abbiamo visto la sorella di Balmier
Che splendea piu che sole
E che dev' essere la sposa del nostro Imperadore.¹*

“The news spread through the town, until there was a crowd of thirty thousand people following Balmier and his three thousand geese. The geese refused to be hurried, but marched slowly through the city, always singing the same song, with their heads well up in the air ; and at last they came to the King's palace. The guards rushed out, and then the King himself came on to the balcony to listen. He called Balmier up to him and threatened to cut off his head, if he did not tell him what the geese meant by their song. Poor Balmier felt very much like a walnut in the crack of a door, but he was forced to obey the King, who, when he had heard the whole story, told Balmier to go back next day to the sea-shore and again call Gianchinetta, and ask her by what means they could free her. He was ready to give away half his kingdom. And, indeed, the King was in love with the mere description of this sea-maiden, and his blood boiled at the thought of her like the new wine in its making.

“Again Gianchinetta heard the voice calling her

¹ “Geese, geese, here we have come ; we have seen the sister of Balmier, who shines brighter than the sun, and is to be the wife of our Emperor.” Only an Italian could make *Imperadore* seem to rhyme with *sole* !

under the waves, and again she went up to the whales and asked permission very prettily to go only once more to see her brother. As she had been so obedient last time they allowed her to go, and she thanked them very politely and swam out to Balmier. Gianchinetta was in a great state of mind when she heard that the secret was known.

“ ‘*Ohimè!* what shall we do? And, oh! *fratello mio caro*, the whales will never let me free; but I will hurry back now and see if I can find out a way of escape.’

“When the whales had had their dinner, and seemed to be in a good temper, Gianchinetta swam up to them, and began to talk to them pleasantly. ‘And now, my good friends,’ she said, ‘supposing—remember, I am only supposing—that I wanted to escape from you, how would it be possible? Of course, you understand very well, that such a thing never enters my head—oh, dear no, I am much too happy down here in the sea. It is true that sometimes we suffer a little hunger, but really I have nothing to complain of. But, let us talk the matter over—just, you know, for the sake of a little conversation.’

“The two elder whales were very angry. ‘What will the girl be asking next?’ they exclaimed, but as they were very sleepy they soon turned over for their nap, and the younger whale took her aside.

“ ‘I will tell you the secret. If three hundred men and three thousand horses were thrown into the sea all at once, we would immediately fall upon them and eat them, and loosen your chain for the time.

•But if you had not freed yourself by the time we had finished our meal, we should drag you back again, and the others would treat you far worse than before.'

"Gianchinetta was so grateful, but as she was thanking him he had already fallen asleep.

"Once again, when Balmier called, the younger whale persuaded the others to let her go. But they were rather cross about it, and said that this really was to be the last time. She swam quickly to her brother, and told him all the whales had said, and then she bade him good-bye and cried, for she never thought that the King could help her.

"The King was delighted with the news Balmier brought him. He sent a proclamation all through his kingdom that he would give twenty thousand francs to each of the three hundred men who would come forward and be thrown into the sea. But no one was tempted. The King was very sad, and then he hit upon the happy plan of giving three hundred convicts their liberty. So the King came down to the sea-shore with all his court, and a whole army of carpenters and the best blacksmiths in the kingdom, and they built a great bridge right out in the sea, and taking the prisoners and the horses they flung them into the waves. Then Gianchinetta came to land, and the blacksmiths fell upon the chain and fetters—toom, toom, toom; bang, bang, bang; gree, gree, gree—such a noise you would have thought *Dominateddio* were creating the world. The King stood by very impatiently, but just as

the last horse was swallowed Gianchinetta was free. The King clothed her in a silken robe, and put such lovely jewels round her neck that she looked like an altar decked out for Easter; and then he sent envoys to the step-mother to tell her that the marriage with her daughter was to take place at once, and she was delighted that he had come round at last, and hurried up to the palace with her daughter. When the door opened, and they saw the King in all his royal robes and Gianchinetta with a crown on her head, and all lovely and smiling as if the sun had kissed her—well, they felt like the *fritto* which has just been dropped into the oil.

So the King married Gianchinetta, and there never had been such feasting in the memory of man, and the wicked step-mother and her daughter—ugly, ugly as a mortal sin—were burnt in the piazza.

*Un pasto e una nozze,
Un paiolo di fave cotte,
Un topo arrostito :
È morto moglie e marito."*¹

¹ This is the orthodox way of ending a fairy tale—at least, about us. It has little meaning, but shows the native love of a jingle—"a feast and a wedding; a cauldron of cooked beans; a roast rat; wife and husband are dead."

XXIII

THE MADONNA OF LA CASTAGNA

"La benedizione di Dio è quella che fa bollire la pentola"

PASS a year in Italy and you will be under the impression that life is one long *Festa*. The Government only acknowledges eighteen, but this restriction does not affect the peasant, the villager, or small landed-proprietor, who clings to his Madonna and saints, and dearly loves an opportunity to decorate his house and send off a few rockets. It seems as if every day the servants come to say that there is some sort of Feast at a neighbouring village, and, with them, the excitement never wears off.

But the delightful thing is to suddenly come upon a festal scene. One summer evening after twilight we were returning home, when, at a bend of the road, we came upon a blaze of light, which streamed forth from out of a mountain village. Flags fluttered, and Japanese lanterns swung across the street, and their light flickered on the eager faces of the people who crowded at every window.

"Away with those things," said the master of the ceremonies in an agitated voice, pointing to our bicycles. "The holy Madonna is coming: ah! here she comes."

Chanting burst from the church, which was set alone on a hill above the village, and from out of its doors came a host of people, seen but dimly in the deepening shadows. And then, as the Madonna appeared—an immense wooden statue in a glass case carried high on men's shoulders—a hundred rockets went off, and every shade of crimson, blue, and green swept in turn across the yellow cape of the priest, the brocaded mantle of the Virgin, the scarlet capes of the Confraternity brethren, and the dark stone walls of the old village. Everything had leapt into a region of enchantment. Quietly and calmly the little procession moved down the street between the crowd of kneeling people, and then they rose and followed the Madonna, with slow even chanting, back into the church.

Just outside the village we came upon some peasant boys, who, in honour of the Virgin, had lit a big bonfire, and the little pagans kept leaping backwards and forwards through the flames.

One summer we witnessed the feast of our local Madonna, whose little white chapel we see shining through the chestnut trees far above the town of Brunella. Throughout the night we had listened to the people who had journeyed from afar singing monotonously as they mounted the steep pathway to the lonely shrine, while Brunella lay still and unlit. From our windows we saw the rivers shine like silver in the moonlight; the air blew cool from the sea—that peculiar coolness of an August night



AN EVENING FESTA



in Italy among the hills. At five we started, just as the mists were rolling up the valleys. The town was now alert, and several Brunella families were also on their way. The *Borghesi* cannot all afford a *villeggiatura* at Baths or at the sea-side, and so seize upon every opportunity to scour the country in search of Fair or Feast where they can enjoy the fresh air in company with an amusing crowd. The women were dressed in smart dresses, very tight and hot looking; a black lace veil or silk scarf worn over their heads saved them from the commonplace. They waved their fans lazily to and fro, and as they slowly climbed the hill talked incessantly, while behind them followed a servant or friendly peasant woman, who for a few half-pence gladly carried the immense basket of provisions. The men folk walked in groups, holding their children by the hand.

The pathway was lined with beggars of all descriptions, who in one incessant drone called upon us for alms, blessing those who gave, and, in raucous unison, cursing those who refused. We recognised many well-known trampers of the road, and many lame and deformed who must have reached this height on the shoulders of their more stalwart brethren. Further on, the ringing of the church bell mingled with the comic songs and love ditties of a band of mountebanks to the accompaniment of guitar and mandoline. Then at the bend of the hill we came upon the church. It stands parallel to the mountain, whose summit rises sheer above it, and abuts upon

a well levelled *piazza* which seems to be making an effort not to slip down into the river-bed thousands of feet below. From this height our fortress looks like a mere mushroom in the plain.

The *piazza* was packed with people: in one corner by the church door a veritable hag, who called up a vision of cauldrons and incantations, presided over a roulette table and raked in the coppers with a claw-like hand. One side of the church was hung with innumerable leaflets for sale, printed with the words of the last popular songs from Florence and Naples, which, judging from the woodcuts adorning them, were of a coarse nature, and often in derision of priests and monks. There were many booths set out with the usual trinkets and pink sweets, fashioned into Madonnas and Infant Christs, and bundles of nut chains which the young peasant gives to the girl he courts. On the slope of the hill, overlooking the *piazza*, a Brunellesque had set up gargantuan barrels of white wine, and a hundred groups of family parties were gathered beneath the shade of the chestnut trees, with their big basket of provisions at their feet. One dish is indispensable on these occasions—a sort of baked pudding of rice and chopped pigeon, which has a great deal of rice and a diminutive amount of pigeon, and is called a *Bomba*.

For fully an hour all our eyes were turned upon a well-known figure both at Fair and Feast—the seller of nickel medals of the Madonna. The manner of his sale is characteristic of the Italians'

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universal power of acting and of their love of talk, and although I had often seen and heard him, I could not resist the fascination of standing there with the rest. The man mounted on to an old box which contained something which was to be the climax of his exhibition; an air of mystery and expectation was made to rest around it, and a long story had to be told before it could be opened. The actual tale can be told in a few words:—A well-known deputy, taken some few years ago near Naples by the brigands, was robbed of a large sum of money, and sentenced to death for fear that he might set the police on his captors. At the moment when the brigand chief, a veritable fire-eater, was going to shoot, the *Signor Deputato* held up a medal of the Madonna and the brigand's arm fell withered to his side, and in the confusion following such an incident, the prisoner escaped. Were I to record on paper the by-paths into which the story-teller wandered, and the details he employed wherewith to embellish and lengthen out the tale, I would fail to give any idea of this wonderful discourse. The enchantment lay in the actor's power of vizualizing his scenes, and in the eager faces of the silent crowd about him. Although he had probably told this tale most days of his life, he was still thrilled by its dramatic possibilities and knew when to besiege us with words, and when to hold us suspended by a silence and a gesture. We all felt very creepy when the brigand was going to shoot, and were all worked up to the right pitch when the

moment came for the mysterious box to be opened. Immense bunches of nickel medals were then pulled out one by one, and offered to us by the orator in the most engaging and insinuating manner. He told us that, being the same medal as had saved the illustrious Deputy, they were worth at least twenty francs a piece, and he was literally giving them away as being blest he could not name a price. Dropping his voice he hastened to add that, if we liked to offer him something, that was another story—he was a poor man as they could see—and, as his audience knew too well that even a vendor of holy talismans never gives something for nothing, each handed out a halfpenny. Old and young, men and women, eagerly bought for themselves and for absent ones, and almost in a twinkling of an eye the bunches had dwindled, and the man's pocket bulged with coppers. Later in the morning I saw him leaning lazily against the wall of the *piazza* smoking a pipe and gazing dreamily at the crowd, and I would have guessed him to be a tiller of the fields rather than an itinerant actor and vendor of goods combined.

And what of the Madonna of La Castagna all this time? The *Borghesi* wandered about in the woods or sat on the grass beneath the shade of the chestnut trees eating the festive dish. I saw very few spend more than a minute in church. The only people whose heart and soul seemed full of the sacredness of the occasion were the peasant women and some old peasant men. They had attended the

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earliest Mass and some already, by eight o'clock, were on their way to their distant homes. Only one or two were in costume of coloured stays worn over white chimisettes. To see the peasant women in all their pride of gorgeous coloured stays, gold chains, earrings, and immense pins fastening their square-folded head-dress of linen, you must go to the South. Or at the great summer feast of St Francis' *Perdono* at Assisi you will see the pilgrims gathered from the Abruzzi and Basilicata: their frenzied devotion before the Saint's shrine contrasts strangely with the calm of the Umbrians, and no less striking is the contrast of costume.

For a long time we watched the peasant women and rough mountaineers in this little chapel of La Castagna, and marvelled at their child-like faith. A young priest sat up on a high desk by the door selling Holy pictures and offering a basket of miniature wooden limbs to those who entered. It was a strange assortment, and each one chose out the counterpart in wood of the part of his body which disease had attacked in his or her person, and moving towards the altar, each one held up this symbolic fragment towards the Madonna's image and prayed for recovery. It was a scene of peace and of quiet entreaty to an all-powerful image.

The shrine of the miraculous Madonna was poor. The peasants of the Apennines have little to offer, and the plain silver ex-votos meant much sacrifice by a people whose hearts were full of gratitude for some petition granted. Some of the women, poorer

even than the rest, had offered their long braids of dark hair.

It was with some difficulty that we discovered the story of the wonder-working image ; its worshippers were ignorant of it, and the priests evaded all our enquiries. But in an old book I learnt that early in the nineteenth century a peasant had been felling a chestnut tree on this mountain side, when suddenly their issued a piteous moan, the pieces flew apart, and in the very heart of the tree was disclosed a painted image of the Virgin and Child. The fervour of the whole countryside was aroused by the story, and soon the fame of the image was established with many miracles. But what seems unfair is that the peasant, who had unwittingly struck his axe on the Madonna's picture, died, and all his family were stricken with various misfortunes.

The Madonna under every guise is the patroness of Italians in every walk of life, and even at the feasts of the most famous saints there is always the refrain, "*Erviva la Madonna.*" Indeed, they see the Madonna everywhere, even in a pack of cards. Once a little peasant child was found praying in a field before a small altar which she had made out of a cardboard box covered with a handkerchief and adorned with wild flowers, and in the place of honour she had set a playing card, the Queen of Hearts—" *nostra Vergine Santissima*," she called it.

I shall never forget going into a church at Perugia and finding the priest and his acolytes trying to dress

the Madonna for her great feast of the Immaculate Conception. The statue was of painted wood standing about five feet high, and had been placed upon the ground. The priest hovered round holding the new dress in his hand, utterly perplexed at which end to begin. As the schoolmistress came in he heaved a great sigh and abandoned matters over to her. He smiled complacently as she quickly hooked the skirt round the Madonna's tiny waist, buttoned up the tight-fitting little bodice, fastened on the gold earrings and necklace, and placed a dainty lace handkerchief in her hand.

The discarded gown lay in an untidy heap on a table : it was a perfect piece of seventeenth century work, crimson carnations and pink roses embroidered on a biscuit-coloured silk. "Why," I asked, "do you not leave on this lovely gown for the Madonna's feast?"

"Oh," exclaimed the priest, "how can there be any comparison?" and the acolytes looked up at me amazed.

XXIV

COUNTRY FAIRS

Tre donne fanno un mercato e quattro una fiera

THE countryside seemed unusually alert all the summer through. We never seemed to go a walk or a drive without coming across some new sign of the peasant's season. One afternoon we had turned the carriage on to the grass under the chestnuts, and as we waited to rest the horses, processions of people kept passing down the road on their way home from the Fair. The first to come was a local magnate, owner of a ruined castle where he stores his wine, and of a comfortable pink villa where he lives. He rode a small donkey, his small son sat on the saddle in front, his wife—"a lady with a hat"—walked behind him. With a haughty nod he acknowledged our bow: he has never forgiven us for coming to see his ruins in company with Ulisse the stone mason. Then followed a band of peasants carrying home new boots slung across their shoulders and a new hat stuck on top of their old one, a woman bringing home her cows, and another carrying a basket on her head closely packed with empty *fiaschi*, having disposed of her milk at the Fair, and wedged in somehow was a

small baby who gave full warning of its presence. Men were driving calves tied together in couples, and others carried a lamb across their shoulders like the picture of the Good Shepherd, which to an English child has no meaning. There was the usual pig which would not go, and a baby donkey gambolling down the road in front of the mother, which was ridden by a very stout owner. The young men had flowers behind their ears, and wore their hats in a gay and careless fashion at the back of their heads ; the women wore new and gaudy kerchiefs and holiday dress. All had done a little courting as well as business. Our driver, not to be outdone, hurried off into the woods to pick flowers for the decoration of the carriage, and stuck big nosegays in the sockets of the lamps and garlanded the horses' heads. Even unadorned he was proud enough of the decrepit old landau, always insinuating what a treat it was for us to drive behind two horses. Each time the almost hingeless door flew open, he reiterated his remarks on its newness, and remained unabashed when he was obliged, in despair, to tie it up with his garter.

The Fair at Marmarasco was the most picturesque I have ever seen, and to that we went in less dignified manner : Mariannina and I took it in turns to ride a donkey which needed much encouragement along the mountain-track. Across the river we could see the whole country-side on its way to the ford. Women with skirts rolled up above their knees, and baskets of fruit or bread on their heads,

strode gallantly into the water ; men drove their sheep and oxen across ; light carts went bumping into the hollows of the river-bed ; and the ferryman pulled his boat across by the rope in ceaseless journeys for the more prosperous. The village proved silent and deserted ; a magnificent pomegranate nodded over a quiet garden wall, mingling its flowers with an oleander in full bloom ; the sky was intensely blue, and the air seemed to shimmer with heat. Reaching the end of the village we came to the church door, and suddenly found ourselves among a crowd of peasants who knelt on the grass in the shade of a chestnut wood, attending the early Mass. Beyond them stretched a long vista of booths set in among the trees, and everywhere beneath was smooth grass and moss like the fabled lawns of the poets.

Crimson and golden counter-panes, laces, ribbons, and stuffs of every shade were hung round the stall, or loosely thrown over the branches of the trees ; shining tin sauce-pans and copper pitchers swung out on projecting poles, and a merry-go-round showed unusual colour against the green background. Beneath these great chestnuts, with their broad spreading branches, the Fair looked in miniature, and one recalled Callot's Fair of the Impruneta, and half expected the favourite jugglers and mummers to skip lightly in among the crowd.

Some fifteen years ago the Fair was the great means of communication for all the country-side, but now that railways have changed the fortunes of

even remote villages, its use, except as a cattle market, is quickly disappearing. Although the Italian still clings to it as part of the general round of the year, and prefers to buy a spade or a hat at a Fair than in a shop, it is no longer one of the great events of his life. We found many of the Brunnellese tradesmen. They had set up their stalls the night before, and slept under the counter guarded by a mongrel sporting dog and a gun. In one little chestnut bower we saw the owner of a coffee-house in Brunnella ; the stout mother, encased in a cream coloured silk gown, the daughter in pale blue satin and high-heeled shoes, were serving out pink and green syrups, and preparing ices for the afternoon. The daughter is called Venus, the brother Cupid. Next door a vendor of holy medals plied a brisk trade, and a lottery for little birds was in full swing.

There is nothing you cannot buy at an Italian Fair ; but the absence of any local industries is a disappointment. The modern Italian despises the old wares, and the peasant woman is beginning to buy cheap imitation laces instead of the good crochet laces, which adorn the linen of every household. She also hankers after cheap and ugly jewellery, and with delight purchases a tinsel butterfly because the vendor at the gaudy stall tells her that it is "stuff straight from Paris" : too intent is she on the butterfly to note the twinkle in the woman's eye.

At another stall, full of local pottery, a young

peasant woman was having an animated conversation over four plates which she had set her heart upon. "Fifteen halfpence," asked the man. "*Ma che!* fifteen halfpence, I'll give you a franc," answered the woman. "Fifteen halfpence," he repeated. "A franc, and not a *centesimo* more," snapped the fair bargainer, and so the man gave up his attempt at honesty, and pocketed the franc.

We found our friend the "Milanin," the local draper of Brunella, trying to grapple with a crowd of customers. Hither and thither he drove his host of sons (I have never been able to count them all); his sensitive face seemed smaller than usual, his eyes more strained, his hands worked in front of the people in telling gestures, as he flew up and down his stall. He always declares the halcyon days of fairs are over; ten years ago he would have taken some eighty pounds on this very day, while now he does not come for gain, but to keep his custom and amuse his sons. It does not prove an amusing day for the father. No one is harder to please than a peasant. The women know the value of every thread in a material, and have decided tastes as to the colour of the new gown, or about the garland of flowers on the new kerchief, which now, alas, is of the "*stile Liberty*."

The "Milanin" declares that now-a-days the peasant-women are getting too particular, insisting upon buying the same stuffs as those chosen by the ladies of Brunella. He hides them away in corners, but their quick eyes detect the newer colour or

texture, and insist upon pulling all these treasures down upon the counter. They can pay, but this does not console him for the fact that in consequence the Brunellese rank and fashion go and shop at a neighbouring town. For some time we watched three men fingering the linens and discussing their merits with measured solemnity. They were dressed in black cloth, with new felt hats, and looked very bunched up and uncomfortable, but thoroughly prosperous. Nothing appeared good enough for them, but just as the "Milanin's" patience was at the ebb, they discovered their idea of perfection, and then there ensued such hot bargaining that we thought it must end in combat. They proved to be peasants who had just returned with a small fortune from America, and brought back with them a taste for fine linen and other luxuries.

All woollen materials are always declared to be English, as a higher price is thus obtained, even from the thrifty peasant. Sometimes the curious spelling stamped on the goods tells a tale; but I have been told on good authority, that many materials manufactured in Italy are shipped off to England, and return with a stamp of British nationality.

We lunched at mid-day in one of the fairy bowers constructed of chestnut boughs fastened together with osiers. A great awning slung from tree to tree protected the people from the strong sun as they sat at the long trestle tables eating, drinking

and bargaining. In one corner a cauldron, fit for an ogre's castle, hung by a chain from the branch of a tree over a gipsy fire. A lean-faced old woman watched the soup, while a younger woman was incessantly employed in rolling out *maccheroni*. The "Milanin" soon joined us, and then appeared Dante, the tinker from Brunella, carrying a salad of tomatoes and onions which he had picked out of the garden of his friend, the local priest. He was a welcome guest at our table, and, in return for such delicacies, we gave him wine and chicken bones. Our feast was also shared by a peasant and a beggar, who especially appreciated the water-melon. It can be described as a sort of fruit-vegetable, and is delicious in hot weather; it tastes like sugared snow, while its rose-coloured flesh, strewn with its jet black pips, and its dark green skin, appeal to the æsthetic mind. Its various uses appeal to the practical Italian, who tells you laughing, as he buries his nose in a slice, a corner projecting beyond each ear: "*Si mangia, si beve e si lava la faccia*" (you can eat, drink, and wash your face with it).

The heat was very great in the crowd, and we soon wandered down the hill to the river, which looked so inviting that we each searched for a secluded green pool. As Mariannina was not daunted by so trivial a matter as the want of a bathing gown, she bathed in her chemise, and dried herself on her white petticoat.

In the cool of the evening we started home; Mariannina was in a boastful mood, as she had bought an

astonishing quantity of Spanish onions for a franc, which she wreathed round my donkey's neck. "I bought them," she said, "early in the day, before the onion-seller knew that I was the servant of the English *Signori*," and her eyes glistened, as she related her wonderful forethought.

Because of its unique natural surroundings, the Fair of Marmarasco is looked upon as an excuse for a holiday jaunt, whereas the Fair of Ragnola resembled more the usual fair of barter and bargaining. It takes place on August the 10th, the feast of St Lawrence, and the attraction was to have been a game of cheeses. These immense round cheeses were food for the gods, they told us, and the furthest thrower carries off the coveted prize, the rest being sold to the less fortunate. Like most Italian information, the date proved incorrect, as we found the game only took place in carnival time, when the weather is cool.

We had settled on the spur of the moment to go to the Fair, and started early in the morning in a *baroccino*, which always savours of adventure. The spinning motion of the light cart, swinging so easily on its two wheels, exhilarates and sends a delicious pulsing of life through one's veins, while the close proximity of the horse's hind legs to one's knees only adds to the sensation of coming events. Dandolo, the owner, had refused to give us a whip; with that diplomacy, sucked in with their mother's milk, he said the animal was of an unusually sensitive nature, and his pace unsurpassed in the country-side.

Fortunately the reins were of extra thick leather. We sped along the white roads, between the ripening vineyards and fields of Indian corn, feeling that the mountains, the hill-set villages, and the feudal castles all belonged to us that day. Every now and then there was a friendly race, as another dweller in our town tried to pass us. But the "Milanin's" good, fast steed was at a disadvantage; father and four sons sat backwards and forwards in all directions, with legs hanging over the wheels of a cart built to hold two. We laughed and left them far behind.

Not a single modern house has been added to Ragnola, which is as old as the hills, and looks as if it had grown out of the valley by the mountain torrent. A feudal castle, whence the scion of a princely family once ruled the country-side, frowns down upon the village, and is still called the "eagle's nest."

The shops all date from mediæval times, but are in the old Roman manner: the door and window are in one arch, with a broad stone counter across the opening facing the street, so that customers can see the mechanic at his trade. At night one shutter closes the whole shop front. Some have rough tracery above the lintel, and ancient columns set in the wall. Italians have ever gathered up the old and made it part of their surroundings.

Great awnings, swung across the street above the booths, caught the golden sunlight and cast it back





GOING TO THE FAIR

again upon the faces of the crowd. Out of one of the low, dark dwellings, where the figure of a woman could only be distinguished by the light of the fire as she bent over a cauldron, a man sprang towards us. In one hand he held a bronze Buddha, in the other an image of the Madonna. There was a look of triumph as he held them out to us. We recognised in him a wandering chimney-sweep who had suddenly appeared one morning at the castle determined that we should buy his stock of curios, which he had left at home. I hurt his feelings deeply by mildly hinting that we preferred to see what we purchased.

"*Signora*," he said, drawing himself up, "I assure you that you can have full confidence in my good taste. I am never likely to sell you anything which is not beautiful. You cannot see the things, because, when I live anywhere, I live a great many miles away, but the god I can sell you is very old and rare."

We did not see him again until a year later, at this Fair, and then we bought neither the Madonna nor the Buddha, but remained good friends, and he continues to roam the country far and wide, cheerfully sweeping chimneys and assuring everyone of his excellent taste.

The chief business of the Fair was the selling of cattle and sheep. The animals were herded together in the dry river-bed close to the village, where poplars, growing on the bank high above it, cast down a slender shade. The oxen turned weary eyes upon

the peasants, who pushed and pressed among them, and filled the air with a buzz of talk. A bargain is rarely concluded upon an empty stomach ; the crafty peasant, especially when he has a poor animal to dispose of, drags on the bargaining until the magic hour of twelve.

We glanced into the *trattoria* as it began to fill. The long vaulted room, with thick pillars supporting the barrel-shaped roof, looked like some cavernous retreat of Bacchic followers. The walls gleamed white, and the men sat at little marble tables plying freely at the golden wine and twisting yards of *maccheroni* round their forks from a plate piled high. There were the usual bargainers, and the beggar eating heartily after a successful morning ; the sporting priest, who never misses a Fair ; the prosperous bailiff, pulling his money out of a greasy pocket-book, and contentedly counting it in a quiet corner ; and the bearded peasant from the higher Apennines come to sell cheeses, in buskins, with a gourd for water slung over his shoulder and a pointed hat stuck on at an angle. Every now and then the bargainers jumped to their feet gesticulating wildly, arms and fingers outstretched above their heads, and invoked every saint in the calendar to testify their honesty, casting the while a volley of abuse at each other. Down came their clenched hands upon the table, and sent the wine swinging in the rush-covered flasks. Every minute we expected to see the glint of a knife ; the din was deafening. When the bargain was concluded, hands were

clasped in an iron grip, and a third party seized on to them and shook them up and down as a seal upon the treaty. Then they sank quietly down upon their chairs, and fell again to the steaming plates of soup and *pasta*, and the golden wine never ceased in its round, and people were ever running to the cellar, which was filled with Titanic barrels.

One door of the *trattoria* gave out on to the crowded street of booths, the other opened exactly opposite on to a short flight of marble steps leading up to a vine arbour, where more tables were laid. For a moment the figure of a priest paused at the top of the stairs, and looked down upon the feasters. He was the owner of the wine barrels.

As the evening closed in, the room became more crowded, and the wine flowed like a river.

"It has been a splendid day for Don Michele," remarked Dante the tinker, "his wine is good."

The babble of voices, the sound of a hand organ, and the lowing of cattle followed us far down the road on our way home, and then, at a turn, the silence of the mountains fell around us, and we watched the flush of sunset sweep across the Carrara peaks, while the villages in the valley grew dim and shadowless.

XXV

A DINNER PARTY AT WHICH IS RELATED : HOW AN
AMOROUS ADVENTURE OF A NOTARY WAS MADE
PUBLIC ; HOW A THIEF WAS BLESSED ; AND HOW
A VENGEANCE WAS TAKEN WORSE THAN DEATH

A tavola non s'invvecchia

AS we raced home after the fair at Ragnola, the sun sinking lower and lower, a vision floated ahead of us of our guests waiting patiently for their dinner. "Il Milanin" kept calling out to us to stop and taste the last year's vintage of a friend whom he had picked up on the road, but knowing the suffering often resulting from their wonderful hospitality, we called back our thanks and sped along faster, until gradually his piteous voice grew faint. "Il Milanin" was one of our invited guests, but we hardly expected him that night.

The dinner party was in honour of a full moon, and the guests assembled were Signora Fausta, Paolo, and their small son. The trestle-table was laid on the eastern terrace which is above the gun-powder magazine and overhangs the torrent river. Adelina had surpassed herself in the variety of her decorations: plates were piled high with peaches, apricots, and figs, while the culminating point of interest was a huge water-melon which, filled with sugar and cognac, had been hanging all day in the

icy waters of the cistern. The table-cloth, edged with peasant crochet lace, always gives a characteristic touch to her efforts.

It had been very hot all day, but now, as the moon rose swiftly up like a world of fire from behind a jagged peak of the Carraras, the evening breezes began stealthily to creep up towards us.

At first we were rather a subdued party ; and for some unknown reason there was only a diminutive portion of soup, but fortunately Mariannina had served it up in small cups, which I hastily explained was according to French fashion. "We got out of that difficulty very well," said Mariannina afterwards in a satisfied tone.

Paolo was shy, and laying his hand upon his broad waistcoat, modestly declined a second helping, until his wife, with many a "*Perbacco ! Paolo*," urged him on to fresh efforts. She needed no pressing. It is one of the delightful things about her that she thoroughly enters into everything, and settles herself down to enjoy the present. "Yes, *Signora*, this is most excellent," and calling on her favourite god she asked for more. Then, recollecting herself, she added in an insinuating voice, with her head on one side : "*Oh ! cara Lei*, but just a wee, wee, little bit, please."

Just as we had finished, and it was past nine, "Il Milanin" arrived, with a son of sixteen and daughter of eleven, and seemed more than usually lively. Being a very highly strung and delicate man, a glass or two of wine goes to his head, for which

reason at home he is a teetotaler ; but to refuse any hospitality in a friend's house would require the obstinacy of the domestic ass, and, besides, you run the risk of mortally offending your hosts. My heart then rather sank when I saw Paolo dive into the castle cellars and reappear with two bottles of his own wine, which is very good, but strong, and fizzes like champagne. Hitherto they had kept this special wine under their beds, but the constant popping of corks in the hot weather so got on their nerves that they asked us to house it in our capacious cellars. Everyone except ourselves declared the wine to be quite mild ; it certainly had a delightful effect upon "Il Milanin" and Signora Fausta, to whom every turn of the conversation recalled some fresh anecdote. Sitting here on the grass-grown terrace, the fortress frowning down upon us, the *lucerne* flickering in the night breeze, the moon, now high up in the clear sky, casting ghostly light upon the chestnut woods and castle-crowned hills, our thoughts went back to the story-weavers of old Italy, whose listeners must have often sat around them in such a scene. The spirit of story-telling, as we have seen, is not dead among the people ; but now there is no Boccaccio, Sacchetti, or Bandello to turn their tales into immortal prose.

Someone happened to mention the town Notary, who had come up the previous day to see the Fortezza, which he had known so many years as the meeting-place for club dinners, but never thought would become anyone's home. "Now," I said,

turning to Signora Fausta, "I am sure you have no story to tell me about the Signor Notaro, for surely he has always been a pattern of virtue, in contrast to these many faithless ones we are so often hearing of."

Signora Fausta looked very knowing, and drawing her chair nearer to the table, took a sip of wine, closing her eyes mysteriously, as she began: "Il Signor Notaro is old now, and he has married a second wife, who keeps him well in hand, but before that—whew! No one had any suspicion; who indeed would have thought him a man for serenades. You know his shy, gentle, and rather foolish manner, and his way of drawing his long cloak about him and bowing low as he meets one in the street, and then that mincing, *staccato* way of talking, as if he were tasting each word. Neither had his wife, such a good woman, any suspicion, until a little incident happened which made us all laugh very much. This happened long ago. The Signor Notaro had a friend, an engineer, who was staying in Brunella, to see about some surveying work he had to do in the hills a few miles away. Our Notary had a donkey, and his friend one day asked him for the loan of it, as he had to make some observations just beyond the little village of Malacosta. The donkey was a good one, and would even trot quite a distance. 'What an excellent animal,' thought the Signor Ingegnere, 'I quite envy my friend.' The afternoon was very hot and the donkey soon slowed down, but the Signor Ingegnere was perfectly contented,

enjoying our beautiful country. Suddenly, when they came to the fortified gates of Malacosta, the donkey pricked up his ears, and began to trot in a way that made his poor rider bump up and down in a most inconvenient manner. No one could stop him. Tic-a-tac, tic-a-tac along the paved street; then suddenly, as to nearly throw the Signor Ingegnere out of his seat, the donkey turned sharply to the right under a dark archway, and trotted straight into a small courtyard. Here he stopped, and again so suddenly that the Signor Ingegnere had to clasp his neck. The tic-a-tac of the hoofs had been heard; a pair of shutters were flung open, and a beautiful woman leant out smiling. But when she saw the stranger on the familiar donkey, she hastily drew back, and shut the shutters with a bang. Tic-a-tac, tic-a-tac went the donkey's hoofs back again through the village and all the way home. The Signor Ingegnere did all in his power to turn it back through the village; he cursed, he cajoled, he tugged at the reins, he called on St Anthony, who is the patron of donkeys and all other animals, but that donkey had learnt his lesson too well. The consequence was, that when the Signor Ingegnere got back to the house of the Notaro, he seemed to be possessed of the Devil himself,—he was so mad indeed that he let the story out in the hearing of the whole household.

“The donkey was sold, and next time our Notaro chose a mistress nearer home and trusted to his own legs. Paolo, give me a little more

wine, a very little," and Signora Fausta coughed elegantly.

"Talking of letting the cat out of the bag reminds me of poor Corrado," began the Milanin, to whom the long silence had been insupportable. To stop him now would have been like trying to stem a rushing torrent, so Signora Fausta resigned herself to listen.

"It happened in this way. Corrado, the elder brother of Andrea, the innkeeper here, had a violent quarrel with his wife some years ago, and determined to go off to America, leaving his wife and young children behind. We none of us knew the rights of the story. I have heard it said that he was jealous of a cousin."

"*Già, già,*" said Signora Fausta, "a handsome cousin."

"One day Corrado came into the room while his wife was writing a letter. 'Give me that letter to read,' he cried, but before he could snatch it from her she had swallowed it. Some say there was nothing in the letter, and that all the wrong was on his side. Well, he went off to South America, made quite a lot of money (he was a sharp fellow), and sent for his sons; his wife he would not have at any price. As the years went on and he never gave her a single penny, she grew very bitter against him, and even incited his sons against him. He had his suspicions, and searched their trunks, and when he found her letters full of abuse against himself, he hated her more than ever. After a time, when he

had made quite a good fortune, he thought he would like to see his native town again and his family—not his wife, of course. He took with him forty thousand francs in bank notes, and on the ship he handed his pocket-book to the head officer on board for safety. The day that they were due to arrive at Genoa the money was returned to him. At the mid-day meal there was a sudden cry of 'land,' and everyone dashed up in great excitement to get a first glimpse of Italy. But when he returned to the dinner-table he put his hand in his shirt and the pocket-book was gone."

Il Milanin had acted the whole scene. He was now standing up, his hair positively erect, his eyes starting out of his head—for the moment he had become the robbed man. We were all breathless. He continued in an awe-struck voice: "Corrado did not know what to do; he cursed like a madman. He hated to make the amount of his loss public, but it was necessary. The officers on board suggested offering a reward if the thief would secretly put the money back in a given place, but the device failed. The only thing the authorities on board could do for him was to stop the ship short of the harbour and have him landed. This would give him a good start of the thief. Of course Corrado was annoyed at being forced to proclaim throughout Italy the amount of his loss. It is more convenient to appear poorer than you are, but the only chance of getting the money back was through the newspaper. The end of the affair was that, by

spending some thousand francs in telegrams and advertisements, he got back all the money. Now came his punishment. Someone in Brunella saw the story of his loss in the newspapers, and at once told his wife, who came to the conclusion that, if he brought over such a sum on a trip of pleasure, he had left behind him a very much larger sum, and she immediately took proceedings to force her husband to give her a certain sum. The case went into court, a compromise was arrived at, and Corrado was forced to pass her so much a month—only forty francs, I believe—but she was thankful for that small certainty.”

“ Ah ! ” exclaimed Signora Fausta, “ how delighted that poor woman was ! She said to me only the other day : ‘ Believe me, Signora Fausta, if that thief were to come to Brunella, I would feast him, I would give him a king’s banquet, I would go down on my knees to thank him. Indeed, every night as I light the lamp before my Madonna I pray to her to bless him. ’ ” And Signora Fausta laughed heartily at the novel idea of blessing a thief.

“ Did she ever see her husband again ? ” we asked.

“ Only from her window one day as he passed with his brother, but he never looked up, and very soon afterwards he sailed back to America, where he declares he will end his days. ”

“ We are always hearing of the Brunellese husbands sailing away to America, ” I remarked.

“ And sometimes, ” said Paolo, “ they give their wives a surprise visit and see how they have been

employing their time in their absence. While you were away last summer one of these *Americani*, from Castagnetto near here, suspected his wife, and cut off her head in the night. The woman was a good soul and innocent, all the neighbours declared, but he never stopped to ask. It was an ugly case, and he did well to return as quickly as possible whence he came.

"And is it the woman who is always so faithless?" I asked.

"*Ma che!*" broke in Signora Fausta, "only a man is a man, and we do not expect our husbands to be so many San Giovanni's. Now, if my Paolo told me he had never loved anyone but me, I should not believe him, but I should thank him for a very pretty compliment."

Here Paolo protested in a love song, addressed to his wife, but broke down in the middle, which produced considerable merriment.

"But as I was saying," continued the Signora, "a certain decorum is kept, a screen, even a paper one, is held before the world. Now among the peasants this is more difficult; their life is free and open, and the peasant woman holds to her rights. Did you not hear that noise in the piazza the other day? Two peasant women were fighting over a husband, and the end was funny. The jealous wife waited for her rival on the hillside by la Quercione, where she always comes to get wood. There was no one else about. She fell upon her suddenly, and before the poor woman could escape she cut off all

her hair with a pair of shears. 'Now,' she said, 'go and show yourself to your husband and tell him who has done this, and don't ever dare to come near my man again, or else I'll send the devil himself after you.'"

"That is all very funny," said Paolo, "but remember that other jealous woman. She really was a terrible wench. She asked her rival into their cottage to eat some roast chestnuts, and just as she saw her coming she laid the tongs, red hot, upon the bench by the fire. The woman never suspected anything—though they always say, be on your guard, when a person smiles a great deal and is more than usually polite—and she sat straight down on the red-hot tongs. She was so burnt that her people had to take her off at once to the hospital. But the wife gained her point, for they say the women all fly from him as if he were the customs man."

Signora Fausta listened with a grave air, and her face hardened. "Sometimes," she said, "it is better to take your vengeance with a pistol or let fall the *trabocchetto*, which I have heard happened to lovers in the castles about here not so very long ago. Paolo, you remember that story which the grandfather used to tell us? Oh! it was really a story of the Middle Ages. My good Nonno was cook in the family of the Marchese del M—— for a great number of years, and was with the old Marchesa when her son, the Conte Carlo, brought his bride home to the palace. The young Marchesa Anita was young, gay as a bird, and beautiful as a flower.

It had been a love match, for she brought but a small dowry with her. A few years passed happily; they were rich, and now that the old Marchesa was dead the Marchesa Anita ruled like a queen in the beautiful old palace. Their friends believed them to be devoted to each other; but the Marchese's uncle, a Canon of the Cathedral, began to have suspicions concerning the Marchesa, and he set about to discover her secret. Sometimes our priests are cunning, like foxes. At first his nephew would not listen to any of the hints he dropped, but soon he began to notice things himself, and one evening he determined to hide in the cellar instead of going to the club, which was usual for him to do. Presently the door-bell rang; waiting a little, he went up to his wife's room, and, making pretence that he had something urgent to say to her, forced her to open the door. She stood in the middle of the room deadly pale and trembling violently, and her long black hair fell about her neck. 'You have someone here,' he said. 'Order your lover out of his hiding-place.' His wife threw herself at his feet, and the Conte S——, who was his friend, came forward expecting the Marchese to kill him, perhaps both of them, and he began to plead and to swear never to see the Marchesa Anita again. But the Marchese calmly told him that he need have no fear, for he did not mean to hurt either of them. 'Go,' he said, pointing to the Conte S——, 'but before you leave, pay her.'

"'But,' stammered the Conte, 'I do not under-

stand. I will pay you any sum you like to name. I beg of you to tell me.'

" 'I don't want your money,' answered the Marchese, 'pay her—pay her five francs,' and he pointed to his wife, who stood there like a statue of marble.

" He handed the money over to the Marchesa, and began to think that they had all gone mad.

" The Marchese did not put away his wife, but he never forgave her, and would have nothing more to do with her ; and this was the revenge he took. By her side at every meal stood a little silver salver, and upon it lay the five-franc piece. Their friends never took any notice of its presence, but strangers would look and ask what coin it was. And the Marchese would answer in a clear voice : 'That five-franc piece is what the Marchesa gained in a single night.'

" It killed his wife. She gradually faded away and died within the year. No one could ever understand why it ever should have happened, for the Conte her lover was as ugly as sin, and the Marchese was handsome as a god."

As the Signora Fausta ended her tale we all shuddered. A big white owl suddenly screeched as it flew out of the corner tower where the winds always circle, and gave a heavy flap of its wings as it disappeared into the moat.

It was nearly midnight, and the moon had set. Paolo's little boy had long ago fallen fast asleep huddled up in his father's coat, and had to be shaken up very much like Alice's dormouse. Paolo, seizing

a torch, headed the procession, and we watched his straw hat and yellow shirt, followed by dark, shadowy figures, disappearing down the rocky hillside among the acacia trees, and then we turned to enter the grim and silent castle.



THE FORTEZZA FROM THE MOAT

XXVI

CHERUBINA'S DIARY

Il montanin ha le scarpe grosse e il cervello fine.

I FIRST saw Cherubina some six years ago at a friend's house near Florence: she was a mere slip of a girl, straight from her home in the Etruscan Apennines. She fixed big wondering eyes upon her new English mistress, and owned to the single talent of being able "to wash up." My friend soon found that her method of cleaning plates consisted in turning the scullery floor into a vast lake, and she felt that the girl was too much of a shepherdess, at home on a rocky hill-side, and hopelessly out of place between four walls. But no one had foreseen the stubborn and pathetic resistance on Cherubina's side against the idea of being sent back to her sheep.

Only the day before a little dog of uncertain pedigree had been thrust into my friend's path, and her husband, upon catching sight of it, had exclaimed, "It must be drowned, and at once." Toby sat up and waved his brown paws up and down, until the verdict became "to-morrow, then; to-morrow." It has been "to-morrow" ever since, for Cherubina and Toby together took possession of the Casa di Boccaccio.

Cherubina declared that she would do anything in the world in order to learn her work, but, before starting, she asked permission to have a good look about her. It was curious to watch her slow and careful progress round each room; she touched everything, turned over the china ornaments, and passed her hands caressingly over the furniture and pictures. Then she looked up with a smile, and an expression on her face which seemed to say, "now I begin to understand things." She soon found that there were more things to learn than she could dream of. It had been explained to her that when the hand-bell rang she must immediately come into the dining-room, and she had nodded and said, "*Sì, Signora.*" The first time we waited in vain for her to appear; we rang again, then we listened. Peal upon peal of fresh young laughter sounded from the kitchen, and running in, we found her standing in the middle of the room helpless from merriment. Had we stuck our heads out of the window and shouted lustily, "Oh-h-h, Cherubina, come"—like a true Italian—she would have considered it quite natural. But a tinkling bell she connected only with fawn-coloured cows, and the comedy of this new connection nearly killed her with laughter.

Those who now know Cherubina as an excellent cook and perfectly trained parlourmaid can hardly believe what the metamorphosis has been. But while she learnt a new trade, she kept her charm and simplicity of mind. When she began to look across towards a wider horizon it was with the fresh

untrammelled spirit of a child who saw the world for the first time. Every sight was a wonder to her, every excursion, were it only into the next street, became an adventure. Possessed of a quick observation, few things escaped her, and hastily she chronicled them down for the benefit of her relations and friends, who were never likely to wander across the world as she had done. Her diary, which she wrote to record her first journey to England, is another example of the power continually found among Italians, even among the unlettered peasants, of seeing and describing things in a literary form. And this power is as natural to her as song to the birds. Her parents were too poor to send her to school; most of her days she passed with the sheep; but her native village of San Benedetto in Alpi was not without its influence upon her mind. Although one of the smallest hamlets in Italy, it is as proud as any city, for Dante has mentioned San Benedetto in the *Divine Comedy*, and it seems more than likely that he stayed there. From the windows of the Benedictine Monastery he surely must have listened to the rushing waters of Acquaqueta (the Montone), which at the beginning of canto xv. of the *Inferno* gives him the idea to compare the sound of the infernal waters to the hum of bee-hives.

This connection of San Benedetto in Alpi with Dante—as, indeed, memories of other poets in various parts of Italy—is not merely a point of interest to the scholar, but becomes a vital influence among the people. Some twenty years ago the

Venetian gondolier sang verses from Tasso as naturally as a child tells us the story of Mother Hubbard, but now the traveller only hears the incessant droning of "*Funiculì, funiculà*"; while the muses find a refuge in the mountains and in out-of-the-way corners of Italy. The other day a girl I know was preparing some of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* for her college class; closing the book she began to repeat the verses out loud, but soon broke down. The servant, who was dusting the room, a rough mountain girl, took up the verse where she had dropt it, and declaimed the whole *canto* with an art which her startled young mistress envied.

I too was once surprised when my driver, in describing to me the evil doings of his Syndic, exclaimed: "*Signora*, I can tell you I hate that man; I could gnaw his skull, just as Conte Ugolino revenged himself on the Archbishop Ruggieri."

And my *vetturino* was not a Pisan, but he knew that *canto* out of Dante. The people's songs, too, are full of allusions to ancient gods and goddesses, and to the personages in Ariosto's Orlando. In these mountain villages there is always some old man who is by nature something of a scholar or a poet, and reads or recites to the people as they sit round their fires during the long winter evenings, seasoning chestnuts, making osier baskets, or carving wooden toys for the children. He is also the village scribe, and many are the letters he writes to the *damo* who has gone down into the "bitter

Maremma," or is away soldiering at the ends of Italy. The letter he often writes in verse, and, if an "artist," adorns it with symbolical arabesques. The *damo*, sometimes himself a poet, replies in verse, and tells his Marietta to praise the letter-writer, who seems to him "a sovereign poet."

*Salutatemi, bella, lo scrivano ;
Non lo conosco e non so chi si sia.
A me mi pare un poeta sovrano
Tanto gli è sperto nella poesia.*

Perhaps, too, the village scribe has also the gift of improvisation—a not uncommon one in Italy. There have been many well-known improvisatrices like the famous Beatrice, the wife of a shepherd near Cutigliano, in the Pistoiese Apennines. She could not read, but it was enough to tell her the main outline of a hero's life, and, standing in the midst of her village friends, she would begin at once to chant his deeds in spontaneous verse. They themselves think nothing of this talent. When Signor Tigri, who collected so many of their love-songs, asked one peasant woman to dictate to him some of her verses, she answered, "*O! Signore!* I say so many when I sing! . . . but now I should have to bring them all before me in a vision; if not, they really would not come."

At San Benedetto in Alpi it was *povero Nani* who brought a breath from the world of beautiful romance into their rough lives. "*Povero Nani*," musician, "*improvisatore*," reader and teller of tales, is a suggestive character from even the scanty details

we gathered from Cherubina. He gained a livelihood by playing the violin at all the marriage-feasts, fairs and carnival dances in the country-side. Indeed no festival was complete without Nani, for his was no ordinary playing. Like another Paragot he could make the people weep, and make them dance like possessed fairies, but, unlike Paragot, he never broke his violin over anyone's head, and after his death it was sold in Milan for a hundred pounds. He played in the Tuscan villages throughout a long life, until at last, the dust and choking atmosphere of the innrooms brought on consumption, and there came a day when he said "I can play no more." The people of San Benedetto gave him a hero's funeral, and reverently they laid upon his bier the old violin which they said "had seemed alive." There must have been a touch of genius in *povero Nani*, which, even among the admiring throng of villagers, made him a lonely figure.

Sitting at the feet of Nani as a favoured pupil, Cherubina listened to many a famous passage out of Dante and to many an old tale of fairies, witches, kings, and queens; but he died before she had got beyond her letters. Only four years ago, helped by her English *Padrona*, she learnt to write, and to read her mass-book, but no more than this. To express herself she keeps to the suggestive words of her mountain home. She is not a versifier but a poet, and sometimes taking a word like *a frescheggiare* which she has not found in any dictionary however big, to create her picture she will turn it to her own

account. In her diary the subtle influence of old Nani and of the remote surroundings of her childhood is felt. It also shows the influence of the Sunday sermon delivered by a village priest who knew no literature save his missal and his breviary. And while in her clear vision of things and poetic touch she recalls a medieval chronicler, marvelling at sight of a tunnel, a lift and a tidal river ; terror-struck at sight of rocks and ships ; wondering at English gardens and scarlet-clad soldiers, this little shepherdess shows some of the love and admiration for the delights of modern life which the Italian of to-day prizes more than all the glory of his past.

*O gentilina, gentilina tutta !
Garofanate son vostre parole.*

“DEAR RELATIONS AND FRIENDS,—

“I left Florence to go to London. From there I began to climb the mountains, and the first were the mountains of Pistoja. I felt as if I were at that moment coming into the world, and when we began to find tunnels it seemed to me truly a marvellous thing to enter into the earth and to pass beneath so many mountains. Then at last we came to Bologna, where at that moment many people were in the station, and more than this, there was music ; indeed, I did not know whence it came, but it was truly good to listen to. And then we took the road which goes to Milan, and we always passed one place more beautiful than another. At

Milan we spent the night ; we took a carriage and drove to the 'Otel, and there we entered into a little room and went up with it to the last floor ; it really seemed to me like going to Paradise. In the morning we again stepped into the train and went on and on, always passing villages until we found Monza, where they killed our king—and so many cities of which I did not know the names. This then was Tuesday, the second day of my journey on the road.

“ When we came to Como, which you will have heard mentioned, we saw the Lake of Como, which indeed was a beautiful sight. Then we arrived at Chiasso, and here Italy ends. After this we entered Switzerland, where there were certain rocks and crags to fill one with fear—you can imagine, my dear friends—and great woods of firs and pines, and mountains covered with snow. There were always these tunnels, and we remained in some of them for more than half an hour. At last we came to Bâle, which to my mind is a very beautiful city. At eleven at night we started again, and always on and on, and always going through more tunnels. As I tell you, my dear friends, when I had slept a little during the night I awoke to find myself in France. When we had travelled on a little bit, we went back again by another line, where were certain plains and other places truly beautiful, where one saw only birds, and then one began to see a few cows and different kinds of fruit, apples and pears, and many trees of every kind. And then one began to see

people, women, boys, and children all with hats on as if they were going out for a walk, but each one minded his own work. One was sawing and another was raking over the hay, and I was always going along in the train. But to go back a step—we saw woods of oak and thickets of beeches and broom; it seemed as if I were looking again at the thickets of San Benedetto in Alpi where, as a little child, I minded the flocks of sheep; and always, as we went along, were miles of woods such as you cannot imagine.

“And then we went towards the sea. How I longed for the moment when I should see it. It began to blow a little and to drizzle. Always marvelling, I kept asking my Signora when we should arrive, and she answered me: ‘In a moment we shall be there, dear.’

“This day then, understand well, was the third day that I was on the road, and this same evening we arrived in London.

“As I was telling you, behold came the hour for us to reach the sea, and I, who was always at the window of the train, now no longer saw any land. Everywhere there was a great calm. You can imagine how my eyes opened. There was a ship like a monster which frightened one. I asked my Signora where we were going, and she answered me: ‘We are going in there.’

“The crowd of people was alarming; some carried parcels, others trunks, and we all entered in. We went down to the last floor, where there were certain

rooms, in truth very beautiful, with armchairs to lie down on ; but I, who for the first time saw the sea, could not remain shut in, and I did nothing else but go up and down from one floor to another in order to look about. We had not started as yet, but when the hour for leaving arrived the ship sent up shrieks and howls most frightful to hear, and we began to go a little bit up and a little bit down, but I had no fear and kept my head out. On the ship were many sailors, who asked me if I liked the sea, but I, who knew nothing but Italian, could not speak to them. It seemed good to me to stay at the window, for I wanted to find out how big the sea was. Presently a spray of water dashed in my face, and I tasted that it was salt. The wind was always blowing ; my heart misgave me a little, but the moment passed and I felt light-hearted again.

“ When we neared the land once more, behold, we saw the beginning of England, certain cliffs of earth which looked to me like pipe-clay. And the numbers of people we saw you cannot imagine. From there we started and travelled for another two hours until we reached the London station, and here we must have seen at least a million people ; you cannot imagine, my dear friends, the great confusion of people. Then we left the station and went towards our dwelling. My friends, you may think where my head was, as we entered London, to see the great movement of carriages. Oh, dear friends, between San Benedetto in Alpi and London there *is* a difference. But round the house where we lived there

was no noise to be heard; it was truly a haven—Glebe Place. When we entered the house we set to work immediately. I was like a fly without a head, for no one had lived in this house for three months, and great dirt was not wanting. In the evening we were forced to go out as there was nothing to eat in the house, and we went to a restaurant called the Inn of the Six Bells. The waiter came with great politeness and brought us to eat and to drink, but wine there was none. It had seemed to me an age until I should drink the English beer. My *Padroni* had told me that I should not like it; when I tasted it I could have drunk a whole bottle! You cannot think, my friends, how glad my heart was this first evening that I dined in London and found myself drinking beer out of a silver beaker.

“Near where we live is a street called the King’s Road. You cannot think what the movement is like of people, omnibuses, and carriages. Here one sees people of every race—Indians, Chinese, and Africans, more than one, and these are all people from the other side of the world.¹ Here the streets are enormous, and so wide that on one side the carriages go down and on the other side they come

¹ A friend, after reading this diary, wrote to remind me of Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, Book VII., “Residence in London,” in which he pictures the “mighty concourse” in the streets of London from every country, even unto the “Negro ladies in white muslin gowns.” “But,” writes my friend, “it takes someone of the imagination of Wordsworth, or your shepherdess, to find this picturesque mixture of nationalities an obvious feature in London.”

up, and many times one has to wait a quarter of an hour before being able to cross the road. Often I said to myself—one of my friends ought be here to see what sort of a place London is, who knows what I would pay. You on your side will say—Oh, what is this London? It will be like another city. I say that there are as many people in one street here as in all Florence. Oh, dear relations, I cannot explain everything to you. When I was a little girl and heard Florence mentioned, I used to say, What is Florence like? and they would say to me :

*Chi Firenze non vede,
Nulla non crede.*

And so I now say to you :

*Chi Londra non vede,
Niente non crede.*

“After we had been here a few days my *Signori* took me to see a little of the city itself, where we climbed on to an uncovered omnibus, right up in the air, and to me who, to tell the truth, had never seen anything, it seemed really a marvellous thing. Each street looked like a fair, as you can imagine from the great multitude of people everywhere. Oh, I must tell you that on the other side of our house, you understand well, on the side where the sun rises, is a river which looks like a sea—this river is called the “Tims”; but it is not like an ordinary river, for most of its water comes from the sea. Early in the morning there is very little water, and then towards ten there is a

great deal, which you won't understand. That day, then, I saw many ships and barques, and there were also many amusements. There were guitars and mandolines, and so many other instruments, and when they played, to tell the truth, many times I could have danced. Now, you must understand me that this was not an affair of one day only ; *every day it was the same.*

" Then, crossing to the other side of the river, was a public garden called Battisipaque, which was very beautiful, and where nearly every day I took Tobi out for a run. Here there were many birds, and it was a pleasure to look at all these little animals, so pretty and so tame with everyone. And there were many gardens. It was a delight to smell the sweet scents which they gave out and the perfumes of so many different kinds of flowers. My dear friends, it seemed like Paradise. And there were many trees, so beautiful that the whisperings of their leaves sent forth a breeze so sweet, so soft, that it was a delight.

" My dear friends, believe me, this is a very beautiful city ; I wish that you could come here, if only for five minutes, so as to be persuaded of what I tell you of London ; it is truly a place of great splendour. And you ought to see what men there are here ; if only I could show you some of the soldiers of the different regiments ! When I was in Italy the Italian soldiers seemed fine, but here they are even finer, and their dress is splendid, which makes one lose one's heart. They are all so well set up and

clean that you ought to see them, and there are some who dress half in red. In another regiment they wear their caps all on one side, but these indeed I cannot describe."

"LONDON, 29th September 1902.

"I begin again my beloved book, in order to read it when I return to Italy. My dear listeners, on the 3rd of August my good *Padrona*, knowing that every first Sunday of the month a festival was kept in the Catholic Church, took me to the evening Benediction. But it was nearly two hours' walk, so you can imagine if it was near. Arrived at the church, dear friends, they wanted sixty centimes before they would let us in! We entered. My friends, you ought to have seen my face,—there was a very fat man, with a belly like a cauldron, who showed us into a bench. When I sat down, and looked around and saw the number of people coming in, I began to understand why everyone was made to pay that money, for if all could have come in without paying, the people would have been like the frogs which crowd together in the water in the summer time. Now began the Benediction; to me it had seemed a thousand years waiting to see the customs of the country, but I now saw that they behaved quite naturally, as at San Benedetto and everywhere else. And then began the music with organs. I said to my *Padrona*: 'They sound like the organs of San Benedetto; can it be true that by chance, and by the grace of God, I am there?'

"Several boys sang to the music; so beautiful a

song that it was a delight to listen to the singing of these children. They sang so joyously, a song so spirited, a song so sweet, that they seemed like angels of Paradise. There were strains of violin, and the sound of all these instruments filled us with new life. O dear friends, the music of organs is a very joyous sound ; I have seen many old men of seventy years who, when they heard music, seemed as if their youth were renewed. I could have stayed to listen night and day."

SANDWICH

"DEAR MOTHER,—Now I shall tell you something of the English country. We are now in a beautiful place. The house we are living in is all made of wood, and it looks exactly like a hut ; but inside it is pretty. In front of the house is a canal of water which comes from the sea. The sea rises once in the day and once in the night, and when it rises during the day various ships pass and many sailors. Then there are thousands of sheep and cows and horses, so that it looks like a Maremma, just as I have read of in the geography book about the Maremma of Grosseto. There are immense plains here, and whole regiments of crows, thrushes, and other birds. Besides this, there are beeches and oaks, and many cherry trees, and the wheat is now beginning to turn yellow.

"To-day I tried to go in search of *Pratajuoli*, which is the only kind of mushroom sold here. And I shall try and tell you where I found myself after

walking miles and miles straight across the country. In a place where there were beautiful fields of grass a metre high I began to find sand, and suddenly I missed the grass and I found myself on the sea-shore, which was very beautiful. There I collected many fresh shells of sea-fish, like little toys, which I shall show you when I come home. This sea is called the North Sea, so you will well understand that I am on the side of the North, and therefore thousands of miles away from you.

“ And then here, in these beautiful fields, there are hundreds of betrothed couples, sitting in the shade and airing their love.

*Larga la foglia,
Stretta la via,
Dite la vostra,
Ho detto la mia.*

Arividerci ! ”

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